

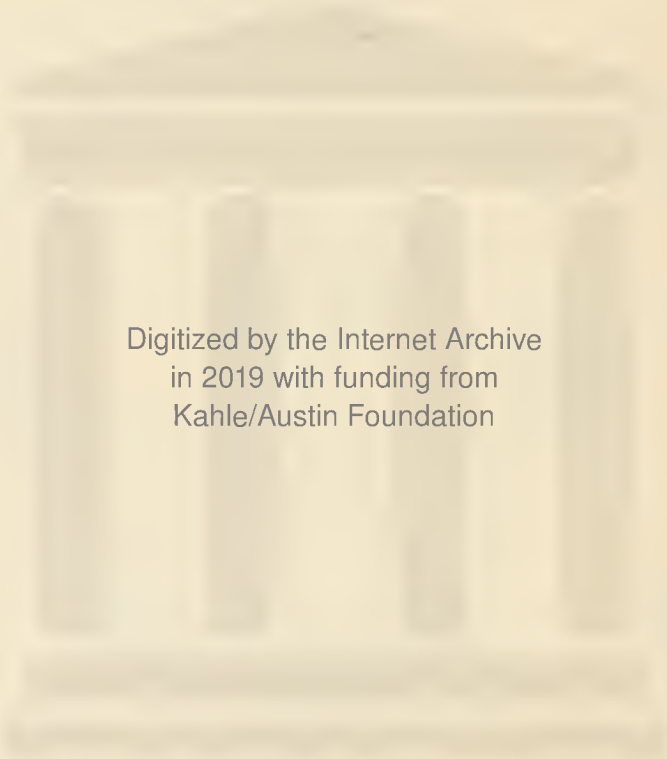
Red Cotton
Night-Cap
Inn Album
The Two Poets

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THE HUGUENOTS

(From the painting by Sir John E. Millais)

“They face the Huguenot and Light o’ the World.”
— THE INN ALBUM.

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF
ROBERT BROWNING

RED COTTON
NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY
THE INN ALBUM
THE TWO POETS OF
CROISIC

INTRODUCTIONS AND NOTES BY CHAR-
LOTTE PORTER AND HELEN A. CLARKE

VOLUME X

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INTRODUCTION

NOVELS in verse the first two poems in this volume might well be called, for in them actual tragic stories have been thrown into artistic form, and the novelist's prerogatives taken of seeing into the inmost souls of the actors, so that their natures and motives are laid bare before the reader.

The manner of presenting the story is with both poems unique in Browning's work: that employed in the "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country" is indirect description carried on in a conversational vein, as the poet relates the incidents to his friend Miss Thackeray, and embellishes them with his penetrating character analysis, or illuminating excursions into the history of the time; while that of "The Inn Album" is direct description of the action, every character being made to speak inside one set of quotation marks, not in the complex dramatic fashion of many of the monologues where quotations within quotations demand constant alertness on the part of the reader if he would keep clearly in mind the separate characters.

The effect resulting from the different styles adopted in these two poems is that the "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country" is distinguished by a sort of rambling gossipiness, reminding one, if it must be said, of the proverbial old woman's way of telling a story, though the gossip be on the plane of psychology, and the rambling be into the by-ways

of history, and accordingly there is not that rapidity of movement usual to Browning when he is treating a purely romantic theme, in which the characters, instead of having their development described after the event, are made to unfold themselves. The contrast between this and "The Inn Album" is the more marked because the latter differs from the poet's ordinary style by being more rapid, owing to the fact that terse and telling bits of direct description constantly put the scene before the reader, while Browning's accustomed way is to present the scene by means of the casual remarks of the speakers about their surroundings. And from this it also follows that each speaker, intent upon what he has to say, can say it more directly and pointedly than he could if he were made to interweave his speech with constant innuendoes and allusions glimpsing the environment or the mental perspective.

Probably few readers could turn to the "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country" for the first time and not feel irritated at the interminable talk indulged in by the poet before he reaches the gist of the story. It is, in fact, a sort of looking-glass country, where the end is always reached before the beginning. The intention being to tell about a red night-cap country, the poet begins with a long talk about white night-caps; and when he wants to illustrate by means of an exhibition of night-caps, he first enlarges upon a fiddle-show, and finally, when through this tantalizing teasing of a colossus at play the red night-cap emerges, the game is not by any means over, for the end of the story is told first, which gives a fresh opportunity for fancy to range in concocting some story not the right one to lead

up to the tragedy of Miranda's suicide. It must be admitted, however, that after the story is once known there is a certain fascination in following these mental gymnastics of the poet. It stands almost as a revelation of the exact workings of a mind of extraordinary mental activity, to which one thought suggests such an infinite variety of other thoughts parallel and contrasting that only by first becoming familiar with all the subjects touched upon by the poet, and then thinking along with him, can you get yourself into a mood thoroughly sympathetic with the poem.

The poet, of course, constitutes himself analyst and critic of the actors in the tragedy as well as the recounter of the story. The broad problem suggested is whether an unconventional course under certain conditions may not have more actual good in it than a course which would commend itself as entirely praiseworthy to society at large, but would lack that absolute truth to one's own highest impulses, which are considered by Browning so important an element in the development of the soul. In this particular case, however, the problem is complicated by the wavering conviction of Miranda. His impulse of love toward Clara he knows, in his own soul, to be the best good of which his nature is capable; yet this impulse is at war with his inherited religious convictions, and he is unfortunately not strong enough either to accept the revelation through human love as a divine truth by means of which he may learn to distinguish between the intrinsically right and wrong and the right and wrong based upon the external conventions set up by society and the church, or, on the other hand, to live according to his religious con-

victions. Therefore his whole life became a lie, fluctuating between his devotion to Clara and his reverence for "La Ravissante." His heart told him his love was right; his mind told him it was a sin; and, never developing to the point where his religion and his love could be made to harmonize, it was finally settled for him through an actual decay of his will. Superstition gained such control of him that he left himself in the hands of fate — or, in other words, threw himself upon the protection of "La Ravissante" — to decide the problem for him. He had complete confidence that she would decide it in his favor; and in Browning's estimation she did, though not in the way expected by Miranda. She did not suspend the laws of gravitation when he jumped from his Belvidere in faith that she would carry him through the air to her, and by this miracle bring about a new dispensation, where all wrong would be made right, but cut the Gordian knot by killing him who was too weak of will to work the problem out for himself.

It is perfectly evident all through the poem that Browning's sympathies are on the side of love, especially as under the conditions the laws of Church and State forbade a marriage. Yet the life of these two in their relation to each other was devoted, faithful, and true for twenty years, and the question obtrudes itself as to

"Which arrogates
Stability, this tent or those far towers?
May not the temporary structure suit
The stable circuit, co-exist in peace?"

implying that the true and devoted love unrecognized by law was more stable than the legal mar-

riage unhallowed by love, — such a contrast being especially pertinent in relation to French life, where the *mariage de convenance* is the rule.

Browning considers Clara less of a failure than Miranda, because she had not even developed to the point where moral problems troubled her, and simply attached herself instinctively to anything which was good for her; and, finding Miranda eminently good for her, was, true to her nature, faithful to him, sympathetic with his moods, her music adapted to his words with such absolute harmoniousness as to attain perfection in her small way. One suspects that the poet may not have been quite just here to Clara, or, since she is his own creation, that he might have created her somewhat differently, as a woman whose soul was first called to life by this true impulse of love, and who through it realized “the worth of love in man’s estate,” but with a woman’s true penetration understood Miranda’s temperament so thoroughly that she knew any attempt to bring him to a clear realization of this truth would send him into the clutches of his ‘inherited conventions, and he would thus lose even the troubled satisfaction he took in their love; so that, instead of her not being wise enough to help him, he might have represented her as being too wise to help him any more than she did.

Sarcasm and humor are weapons always at Browning’s disposal when he chooses to use them; and in this poem he has not spared either in his portrayal of the highly respectable cousins who sought with such religious pertinacity their own material welfare, to be gained through diverting Miranda’s money into their own channels; or of the lady mother so safely ensconced upon the towers,

who spends her time in playing *béziq*ue; or the Church, so strict in the letter of the law, but so willing to wink at iniquity from its own point of view, for the sake of the gifts which come to its coffers. Like Carlyle, the poet everywhere cries out against sham; and in this bit of French world he has made live for us he discerns lies crouching everywhere under the cloak of the respectable, and the truth raising its head aloft in this true love of two beings scorned by society, and scarcely aware themselves of its own value.

The "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country," in spite of the tragic life and death therein portrayed, has its gleam of sunshine; but "The Inn Album" is all sombre. In comparison with the elder man in this poem, Miranda shines forth almost as a saint. It is certainly better to have two warring ideals than none at all; and this man, if he ever had any possibilities in his nature of aspiring toward the light, had allowed them to become entirely choked up with the lowest of selfish instincts. At times in his talk with the young man he seems to show some consciousness that he had missed the best of life; but even his best was so diluted with the selfish desire to *be* happy rather than to create happiness that it may well be doubted whether his soul was not so far gone in decay that regeneration was impossible. It is evident that the young woman whom he had betrayed felt thus in regard to him; for her scorn and distrust are complete when he meets her at the Inn and again tries to win her in words that are moving and piteous enough, but which fall upon deaf ears, not so much because love is entirely dead within her, for she has never been able to throw off the spell he exerted over her, but

because she sees behind these words a treacherous nature bent upon getting what it wants at the moment at any expense, even willing to pose as a penitent soul awaiting her touch to blossom into a new and better life, but incapable of cherishing the gift once it should come into his possession. His subsequent fall to the lowest depths of degradation, when she holds her own against him, and, brought to bay, he shows the cruel fangs of a wild beast, seems to prove that she had read him aright. Yet Browning so rarely presents a soul without some seeds of good within it, that one is prone to wonder whether less scorn and more charity, albeit with no loss of strength on the part of the lady, might not have been a means of bringing what few seeds of good there were in him to life, so that the "ape and tiger" might have had some fair chance of dying. Could the love of the lady and the young man for him have been evoked by anything but some good asleep within his soul? Or may the intrinsically evil put on such a beauteous seeming as to deceive even love itself?

Admirable as the lady is in many respects, she had not a strong enough moral insight to cope with him, or to direct her own energies so that her life might come to some good. However, it must be remembered in extenuation that she was a young girl, motherless, with no knowledge of life, when there came upon her the horror of such an awakening as she had never dreamed possible. With strength sufficient to save herself from the degradation of so-called "honorable" amends, she was not strong enough to see that her own life might yet be made worth something; thus, with the idea of self-sacrifice and atonement, she plunged herself

into a relation which went against every tendency of her at once liberal and artistic nature. Besides, she did not seem to recognize that the old and poor parson should have his rights, though so starved in soul, and should not have been deluded, even though his ideal of marriage was meagre enough, into a union upon a basis still worse than his own. Her lack of truth toward him met its inevitable consequences by putting her so much in the power of the betrayer that her only escape was suicide.

The sole good evolved from all this sin and weakness was its development of the nobility latent within the young man, who reached by means of it a pinnacle rarely attained, where love, transcending the accidents of life, was content if it might only serve the beloved one, and render by the smallest fraction her life more tolerable.

What the future might have in store for him and the lovable young cousin is left to the imagination, and may be filled in in harmony with each one's own ideals.

The unsolved and even unsolvable problem presented by this intense bit of realism awakens as many thoughts as the problems with which Ibsen is so fond of ending his dramas, and it is probably useless to suggest how otherwise the action might have been rounded out, for as Ibsen said about his *Nora*, "My *Nora* could not have acted any other way than she did," so these two beings who had struck athwart each other's paths must needs follow out the truth of their own natures, until, as *Pompilia* says, they should come in some future life under God's shadow.

Dramatically speaking, the poem is an artistic

triumph. The talk everywhere grows inevitably out of the situations, and reveals the external personality as well as the souls of the actors, first as they have stumblingly shaped their lives since the first clash of spirit against spirit, and then in the terrible moment when they all meet again in the final crisis. Mr. Arthur Symons, one of the few Browning commentators who has been able to look beyond the unpleasantness of the story and see its power artistically as a masterly study of character, speaks with force when he points out that "the elder man is one of Browning's most finished studies, and, morally, one of the worst characters even he has ever investigated. He is at once bad, clever, and cynical, the combination of all others, most noxious and most hopeless. He prides himself, above all things, on his intellect, and it is evident that he has had the power to shape his course and sway others. But now at fifty he knows himself to be a miserable failure;" that in the woman we see a being "physically the same, spiritually the ghost of her former self, the subtlety of the picture" being "to show what she is now, while making equally plain what she was in the past — a figure not so much pathetic as terrible." Even more appreciative are his remarks concerning the young man: "Pathetic, and above all pathetic, despite the comic veneer, which, perhaps, only strengthens the impression, is the figure of the young man, the great, rough, foolish, rich youth, tutored in evil by his Mephistopheles, but only, we fancy, skin-deep in it, slow of thought but quick of feeling, with his one and only love never forgotten. . . . His last speech, with its clumsy yet genuine chivalry, its touching, broken words, its intrinsic delicacy and

faltering expression, is one of the most pathetic things I know."

Finally, it is to be noted that the atmosphere of this poem is as distinctively English as that of the "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country" is French. The impecunious aristocrat; the rich "snob;" the poor clergyman, who does tutoring to eke out a scanty living, with a beautiful daughter sensitive and refined beyond any possibilities her surroundings had to offer her; the other elderly clergyman, whose one æsthetic joy, reading Dickens, had been swallowed up in his anxiety over souls; the stuffy inn, where the tragedy is enacted, with its utterly commonplace album, furnishing at once a grim element of humor, and the fatal instrument with which the villain works his designs, — all speak of a land riddled by caste ideals, where a man may be a man for "a' that," but a gentleman is equally a gentleman for "a' that," no matter what iniquities may be included in "a' that." A *chateau* takes the place of the inn as the *mise en scène* of the "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country," and the *deus ex machina* is a sumptuous statue of the Virgin instead of an inn album. Art and good taste reign instead of sordidness and vulgarity, yet the hero in England would have been a rich "snob." In more democratic France, however, he is a cultured gentleman, with æsthetic tastes that might shame the English aristocrat. These are only fresh examples of the fidelity or, perhaps, unerring instinct always exercised by Browning in suiting his setting to his subject. "The Two Poets of Croisic," which concludes this volume, furnishes the appropriate relaxation of Comedy to nerves overstrung by the preceding Tragedies.

It has points of kinship, however, with the "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country." The scene fluctuates in both between a little town and Paris, and in both the style is that of conversational story-telling.

Sitting by the fire of driftwood, with its brilliantly colored flames, the poet tells his companion the story of these two forgotten poets, seemingly suggested by the driftwood which carries him to Brittany and the life of the flames which reminds him of the childish game of naming the flames, and watching them as they die out. This is quite a simple preamble in comparison with that introducing the theme of the "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country," but the manner is similar.

The remarkable thing about these Croisic poets is not that they should have been forgotten, but that they should ever have been famous. Their fame was evidently not due in any respect to the superior merit of the verses, but to entirely fortuitous circumstances, which kindled a sudden fire of enthusiasm just as suddenly to die out.

A homily upon the ephemerality of fame might doubtless be evolved from such good texts, if it were not that the age, the individual characteristics, and even the race characteristics, should be taken into account before sweeping generalizations are made. René Gentilhomme's prophecy would have been considered only a coincidence in a more enlightened age. La Roque and Voltaire would not have bowed before a woman poetess of little genius except in an age when genius was not expected to reside in womankind at all, and when literary aspiration on the part of a woman, if accompanied by sufficient modesty, was regarded as the amiable and

interesting attempts of a bird, by nature wingless, to fly.

Then the French nation has always been subject to wild enthusiasms. France has but recently given an exhibition of the manner in which it is capable of hounding one of its most distinguished geniuses, Zola, because its enthusiasm for the present moment happens to be the integrity of the army at any cost. A little while since it lost its social head in admiration for the Russians, in consequence of which the whole world has since been wearing exaggerated forms of Russian blouses. So can the enthusiasms of France, be they worthy or unworthy, move the world! The poet's humorous hits at the "Academy" and the learned "Forty" show his appreciation of the fact that France, even with her thinking-cap on, has been known to let enthusiasm run off with her in the wrong direction, and keep its geniuses dangling round the Parnassian doors an unconscionably long time.

The thoughts suggested to the poet by the lives of these two forgotten ones appear elsewhere in his poetry.

In "The Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician," Browning shows the practical disadvantage it is to a human being to have had a veritable glimpse of the Infinite, as in the case of Lazarus. It is something like the old myth of Phaeton driving the sun's chariot. His human skill was unequal to the task of managing Apollo's steeds, so human vision is confused by becoming conscious of the infinite point of view, and cannot distinguish in a manner necessary for proper guidance through life the relative laws of right and wrong. Such, he imagines, might have been the case with René, and

the cause why he wrote no more poetry; and such revelations of the divine Browning concludes are a misfortune, for only by being our human selves can we find true development.

The other thought suggested is, "What shall be the test of value of a poet's work, since fame proves so poor a test?" And the answer is, "That poet who lives the happiest life." Such a poet is one who possesses a consciousness above his passions and emotions, and is able to turn these emotional manifestations into artistic channels. This carries us back to the poet of "Pauline," who describes himself, as pointed out in the introductory remarks on "Pauline," as having this sort of over-consciousness. It does not seem to have produced happiness in him, because it was linked with the desire to be and experience all. In other words, the over-consciousness was there, but the passions and desires had not yet come under its complete control. According to this, Browning, it seems, did not believe in the popular superstition that the best poet is he who is possessed by a *dæmon*, but he who himself, the supremely conscious *dæmon*, possesses all his faculties of mind and heart and soul as artistic material.

CHARLOTTE PORTER.
HELEN A. CLARKE.

RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY

OR

TURF AND TOWERS

1873

TO

MISS THACKERAY

I

AND so, here happily we meet, fair friend!
Again once more, as if the years rolled back
And this our meeting-place were just that Rome
Out in the champaign, say, o'er-rioted
By verdure, ravage, and gay winds that war
Against strong sunshine settled to his sleep;
Or on the Paris Boulevard, might it prove,
You and I came together saunteringly,
Bound for some shop-front in the Place Vendôme —
Gold-smithy and Golconda mine, that makes 10
“The Firm-Miranda” blazed about the world —
Or, what if it were London, where my toe
Trespassed upon your flounce? “Small blame,”
you smile,
Seeing the Staircase Party in the Square
Was Small and Early, and you broke no rib.

Even as we met where we have met so oft,
Now meet we on this unpretending beach
Below the little village: little, ay!

2 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY

But pleasant, may my gratitude subjoin?
Meek, hitherto un-Murrayed bathing-place, 20
Best loved of sea-coast-nook-ful Normandy!
That, just behind you, is mine own hired house:
With right of pathway through the field in front,
No prejudice to all its growth unsheaved
Of emerald luzern bursting into blue.
Be sure I keep the path that hugs the wall,
Of mornings, as I pad from door to gate!
Yon yellow — what if not wild-mustard flower? —
Of that, my naked sole makes lawful prize,
Bruising the acrid aromatics out, 30
Till, what they preface, good salt savors sting
From, first, the sifted sands, then sands in slab,
Smooth save for pipy wreath-work of the worm:
(Granite and mussel-shell are ground alike
To glittering paste, — the live worm troubles yet.)
Then, dry and moist, the varech limit-line,
Burnt cinder-black, with brown uncrumpled swath
Of berried softness, sea-swoln thrice its size;
And, lo, the wave protrudes a lip at last, 39
And flecks my foot with froth, nor tempts in vain.

Such is Saint-Rambert, wilder very much
Than Joyeux, that famed Joyous-Gard of yours,
Some five miles farther down; much homelier too —
Right for me, — right for you the fine and fair!
Only, I could endure a transfer — wrought
By angels famed still, through our countryside,
For weights they fetched and carried in old time
When nothing like the need was — transfer, just
Of Joyeux, church exchanged for yonder prig, 49
Our brand-new stone cream-colored masterpiece.

Well — and you know, and not since this one year,
The quiet seaside country? So do I: .

Who like it, in a manner, just because
Nothing is prominently likable
To vulgar eye without a soul behind,
Which, breaking surface, brings before the ball
Of sight, a beauty buried everywhere.
If we have souls, know how to see and use,
One place performs, like any other place,
The proper service every place on earth 60
Was framed to furnish man with: serves alike
To give him note that, through the place he
sees,

A place is signified he never saw,
But, if he lack not soul, may learn to know.
Earth's ugliest walled and ceiled imprisonment
May suffer, through its single rent in roof,
Admittance of a cataract of light
Beyond attainment through earth's palace-panes
Pinholed athwart their windowed filagree
By twinklings sobered from the sun outside. 70
Doubtless the High Street of our village here
Imposes hardly as Rome's Corso could:
And our projected race for sailing-boats
Next Sunday, when we celebrate our Saint,
Falls very short of that attractiveness,
That artistry in festive spectacle,
Paris ensures you when she welcomes back
(When shall it be?) the Assembly from Versailles;
While the best fashion and intelligence
Collected at the counter of our Mayor 80
(Dry goods he deals in, grocery beside)
What time the post-bag brings the news from
Vire, —

I fear me much, it scarce would hold its own,
That circle, that assorted sense and wit,
With Five o'clock Tea in a house we know.

4 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY

Still, 't is the check that gives the leap its lift.
 The nullity of cultivated souls,
 Even advantaged by their news from Vire,
 Only conduces to enforce the truth
 That, thirty paces off, this natural blue 90
 Broods o'er a bag of secrets, all unbroached,
 Beneath the bosom of the placid deep,
 Since first the Post Director sealed them safe;
 And formidable I perceive this fact —
 Little Saint-Rambert touches the great sea.
 From London, Paris, Rome, where men are men,
 Not mice, and mice not Mayors presumably
 Thought scarce may leap so fast, alight so far.
 But this is a pretence, you understand,
 Disparagement in play, to parry thrust 100
 Of possible objector: nullity
 And ugliness, the taunt be his, not mine
 Nor yours, — I think we know the world too well!
 Did you walk hither, jog it by the plain,
 Or jaunt it by the highway, braving bruise
 From springless and uncushioned vehicle?
 Much, was there not, in place and people both,
 To lend an eye to? and what eye like yours —
 The learned eye is still the loving one!
 Our land: its quietude, productiveness, 110
 Its length and breadth of grain-crop, meadow-
 ground,
 Its orchards in the pasture, farms a-field
 And hamlets on the road-edge, naught you missed
 Of one and all the sweet rusticities!
 From stalwart strider by the wagon-side,
 Brightening the acre with his purple blouse,
 To those dark-featured comely women-folk,
 Healthy and tall, at work, and work indeed,
 On every cottage door-step, plying brisk

Bobbins that bob you ladies one such lace! 120
Oh, you observed! and how that nimble play
Of finger formed the sole exception, bobbed
The one disturbance to the peace of things,
Where nobody esteems it worth his while,
If time upon the clock-face goes asleep,
To give the rusted hands a helpful push.
Nobody lifts an energetic thumb
And index to remove some dead and gone
Notice which, posted on the barn, repeats
For truth what two years' passage made a lie 130
Still is for sale, next June, that same château
With all its immobilities, — were sold
Duly next June behind the last but last;
And, woe 's me, still placards the Emperor
His confidence in war he means to wage,
God aiding and the rural populace.
No: rain and wind must rub the rags away
And let the lazy land untroubled snore.

Ah, in good truth? and did the drowsihead
So suit, so soothe the learned loving eye, 140
That you were minded to confer a crown,
(Does not the poppy boast such?) — call the land
By one slow hither-thither stretching, fast
Subsiding-into-slumber sort of name,
Symbolic of the place and people too,
“*White Cotton Night-cap Country?*” Excellent!
For they do, all, dear women young and old,
Upon the heads of them bear notably
This badge of soul and body in repose;
Nor its fine thimble fits the acorn-top, 150
Keeps woolly ward above that oval brown,
Its placid feature, more than muffler makes
A safeguard, circumvents intelligence

6 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY

In — what shall evermore be named and famed,
 If happy nomenclature aught avail,
“White Cotton Night-cap Country.”

Do I hear —

Oh, better, very best of all the news —
 You mean to catch and cage the winged word,
 And make it breed and multiply at home
 Till Norman idlesse stock our England too? 160
 Normandy shown minute yet magnified
 In one of those small books, the truly great,
 We never know enough, yet know so well?
 How I foresee the cursive diamond-dints, —
 Composite pen that plays the pencil too, —
 As, touch the page and up the clamour goes,
 And filmily o'er grain-crop, meadow-ground,
 O'er orchard in the pasture, farm a-field
 And hamlet on the road-edge, floats and forms
 And falls, at lazy last of all, the Cap 170
 That crowns the country! we, awake outside,
 Farther than ever from the imminence
 Of what cool comfort, what close coverture
 Your magic, deftly weaving, shall surround
 The unconscious captives with. Be theirs to drowse
 Trammelled, and ours to watch the trammel-trick!
 Ours be it, as we con the book of books,
 To wonder how is winking possible!

All hail, “White Cotton Night-cap Country,” then!
 And yet, as on the beach you promise book, — 180
 On beach, mere razor-edge 'twixt earth and sea,
 I stand at such a distance from the world
 That 't is the whole world which obtains regard,
 Rather than any part, though part presumed
 A perfect little province in itself,
 When wayfare made acquaintance first therewith,

So standing, therefore, on this edge of things,
What if the backward glance I gave, return
Loaded with other spoils of vagrancy
Than I despatched it for, till I propose 190
The question — puzzled by the sudden store
Officious fancy plumps beneath my nose —
“Which sort of Night-cap have you glorified?”

You would be gracious to my ignorance:
“What other Night-cap than the normal one? —
Old honest guardian of man’s head and hair
In its elastic yet continuous, soft,
No less persisting, circumambient gripe, —
Night’s notice, life is respited from day!
Its form and fashion vary, suiting so 200
Each seasonable want of youth and age.
In infancy, the rosy naked ball
Of brain, and that faint golden fluff it bears,
Are smothered from disaster, — nurses know
By what foam-fabric; but when youth succeeds,
The sterling value of the article
Discards adornment, cap is cap henceforth
Unfeathered by the futile row on row.
Manhood strains hard a sturdy stocking-stuff
O’er well-deserving head and ears: the cone 210
Is tassel-tipt, commendably takes pride,
Announcing workday done and wages pouched,
And liberty obtained to sleep, nay, snore
Unwise, he peradventure shall essay
The sweets of independency for once —
Waive its advantage on his wedding-night:
Fool, only to resume it, night the next,
And never part companionship again.
Since, with advancing years, night’s solace soon
Intrudes upon the daybreak dubious life 220

8 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY

Persuades it to appear the thing it is,
Half-sleep; and so, encroaching more and more,
It lingers long past the abstemious meal
Of morning, and, as prompt to serve, precedes
The supper-summons, gruel grown a feast.
Finally, when the last sleep finds the eye
So tired it cannot even shut itself,
Does not a kind domestic hand unite
Friend to friend, lid from lid to part no more,
Consigned alike to that receptacle 230
So bleak without, so warm and white within?

“Night-caps, night’s comfort of the human race:
Their usage may be growing obsolete,
Still, in the main, the institution stays.
And though yourself may possibly have lived,
And probably will die, undignified —
The Never-night-capped — more experienced folk
Laugh you back answer — What should Night-cap
be
Save Night-cap pure and simple? Sorts of such?
Take cotton for the medium, cast an eye 240
This side to comfort, lambswool or the like,
That side to frilly cambric costliness,
And all between proves Night-cap proper.” Add
“Fiddle!” and I confess the argument.

Only, your ignoramus here again
Proceeds as tardily to recognize
Distinctions: ask him what a fiddle means,
And “Just a fiddle” seems the apt reply.
Yet, is not there, while we two pace the beach,
This blessed moment, at your Kensington, 250
A special Fiddle-Show and rare array
Of all the sorts were ever set to cheek,

'Stablished on clavicle, sawn bow-hand-wise,
 Or touched lute-fashion and forefinger-plucked?
 I doubt not there be duly catalogued
 Achievements all and some of Italy,
 Guarnerius, Straduarious, — old and new,
 Augustly rude, refined to finicking,
 This mammoth with his belly full of blare, 259
 That mouse of music — inch-long silvery wheeze.
 And here a specimen has effloresced
 Into the scroll-head, there subsides supreme,
 And with the tail-piece satisfies mankind.
 Why should I speak of woods, grains, stains and
 streaks,

The topaz varnish or the ruby gum?
 We preferably pause where tickets teach
 "Over this sample would Corelli croon,
 Grieving, by minors, like the cushat-dove,
 Most dulcet Giga, dreamiest Saraband."
 "From this did Paganini comb the fierce 270
 Electric sparks, or to tenuity
 Pull forth the inmost wailing of the wire —
 No cat-gut could swoon out so much of soul!"

Three hundred violin-varieties
 Exposed to public view! And dare I doubt
 Some future enterprise shall give the world
 Quite as remarkable a Night-cap-show?
 Methinks, we, arm-in-arm, that festal day,
 Pace the long range of relics shrined aright,
 Framed, glazed, each cushioned curiosity, 280
 And so begin to smile and to inspect:
 "Pope's sickly head-sustainment, damped with
 dews

Wrung from the all-unfair fight: such a frame —
 Though doctor and the devil helped their best —

Fought such a world that, waiving doctor's help,
 Had the mean devil at its service too!
 Voltaire's imperial velvet! Hogarth eyed
 The thumb-nail record of some alley-phiz,
 Then chucklingly clapped yonder cosiness
 On pate, and painted with true flesh and blood! 290
 Poor hectic Cowper's soothing sarsnet-stripe!"
 And so we profit by the catalogue,
 Somehow our smile subsiding more and more,
 Till we decline into . . . but no! shut eyes
 And hurry past the shame uncoffined here,
 The hangman's toilet! If we needs must trench,
 For science' sake which craves completeness still,
 On the sad confine, not the district's self,
 The object that shall close review may be . . .

Well, it is French, and here are we in France: 300
 It is historic, and we live to learn,
 And try to learn by reading story-books.
 It is an incident of 'Ninety-two,
 And, twelve months since, the Commune had the
 sway.

Therefore resolve that, after all the Whites
 Presented you, a solitary Red
 Shall pain us both, a minute and no more!
 Do not you see poor Louis pushed to front
 Of palace-window, in persuasion's name,
 A spectacle above the howling mob 310
 Who tasted, as it were, with tiger-smack,
 The outstart, the first spirt of blood on brow,
 The Phrygian symbol, the new crown of thorns,
 The Cap of Freedom? See the feeble mirth
 At odds with that half-purpose to be strong
 And merely patient under misery!
 And note the ejaculation, ground so hard

Between his teeth, that only God could hear,
 As the lean pale proud insignificance
 With the sharp-featured liver-worried stare 320
 Out of the two gray points that did him stead
 And passed their eagle-owner to the front
 Better than his mob-elbowed undersize, —
 The Corsican lieutenant commented
 “Had I but one good regiment of my own,
 How soon should volleys to the due amount
 Lay stiff upon the street-flags this *canaille*!
 As for the droll there, he that plays the king
 And screws out smile with a Red night-cap on,
 He’s done for! Somebody must take his place.” 330
 White Cotton Night-cap Country: excellent!
 Why not Red Cotton Night-cap Country too?

“Why not say swans are black and blackbirds
 white,
 Because the instances exist?” you ask.
 “Enough that white, not red, predominates,
 Is normal, typical, in cleric phrase
Quod semel, semper, et ubique.” Here,
 Applying such a name to such a land,
 Especially you find inopportune,
 Impertinent, my scruple whether white 340
 Or red describes the local color best.
 “Let be” (you say), “the universe at large
 Supplied us with exceptions to the rule,
 So manifold, they bore no passing-by, —
 Little Saint-Rambert has conserved at least
 The pure tradition: white from head to heel,
 Where is a hint of the ungracious hue?
 See, we have traversed with hop, step and jump,
 From heel to head, the main-street in a trice,
 Measured the garment (help my metaphor!) 350

Not merely criticised the cap, forsooth;
 And were you pricked by that collecting-itch,
 That pruriency for writing o'er your reds
 'Rare, rarer, rarest, not rare but unique,' —
 The shelf, Saint-Rambert, of your cabinet,
 Unlabelled, — virginal, no Rahab-thread
 For blushing token of the spy's success, —
 Would taunt with vacancy, I undertake!
 What, yonder is your best apology,
 Pretence at most approach to naughtiness, 360
 Impingement of the ruddy on the blank?
 This is the criminal Saint-Rambertese
 Who smuggled in tobacco, half-a-pound!
 The Octroi found it out and fined the wretch.
 This other is the culprit who despatched
 A hare, he thought a hedgehog (clods obstruct),
 Unfurnished with Permission for the Chase!
 As to the womankind — renounce from those
 The hope of getting a companion-tinge,
 First faint touch promising romantic fault!" 370

Enough: therestands Red Cotton Night-cap shelf —
 A cavern's ostentatious vacancy —
 My contribution to the show; while yours —
 Whites heap your row of pegs from every hedge
 Outside, and house inside Saint-Rambert here —
 We soon have come to end of. See, the church
 With its white steeple gives your challenge point,
 Perks as it were the night-cap of the town,
 Starchedly warrants all beneath is matched
 By all above, one snowy innocence! 380

You put me on my mettle. British maid
 And British man, suppose we have it out
 Here in the fields, decide the question so?

Then, British fashion, shake hands hard again,
 Go home together, friends the more confirmed
 That one of us — assuredly myself —
 Looks puffy about eye, and pink at nose?
 Which “pink” reminds me that the arduousness
 We both acknowledge in the enterprise,
 Claims, counts upon a large and liberal
 Acceptance of as good as victory
 In whatsoever just escapes defeat.
 You must be generous, strain point, and call
 Victory, any the least flush of pink
 Made prize of, labelled scarlet for the nonce —
 Faintest pretension to be wrong and red
 And picturesque, that varies by a splotch
 The righteous flat of insipidity.

390

Quick to the quest, then — forward, the firm foot!
 Onward, the quarry-overtaking eye!
 For, what is this, by way of march-tune, makes
 The musicalest buzzing at my ear
 By reassurance of that promise old
Though sins are scarlet they shall be as wool?
 Whence — what fantastic hope do I deduce?
 I am no Liebig: when the dyer dyes
 A texture, can the red dye prime the white?
 And if we washed well, wrung the texture hard,
 Would we arrive, here, there and everywhere,
 At a fierce ground beneath the surface meek?

400

410

I take the first chance, rub to threads what rag
 Shall flutter snowily in sight. For see!
 Already these few yards upon the rise,
 Our back to brave Saint-Rambert, how we reach
 The open, at a dozen steps or strides!
 Turn round and look about, a breathing-while!

There lie, outspread at equidistance, thorpes
 And villages and towns along the coast,
 Distinguishable, each and all alike,
 By white persistent Night-cap, spire on spire. 420
 Take the left: yonder town is — what say you
 If I say “Londres”? Ay, the mother-mouse
 (Reversing fable, as truth can and will)
 Which gave our mountain of a London birth!
 This is the Conqueror’s country, bear in mind,
 And Londres-district blooms with London-pride.
 Turn round: La Roche, to right, where oysters thrive:
 Monlieu — the lighthouse is a telegraph;
 This, full in front, Saint-Rambert; then succeeds 429
 Villeneuve, and Pons the Young with Pons the Old,
 And — ere faith points to Joyeux, out of sight,
 A little nearer — oh, La Ravissante!

There now is something like a Night-cap spire,
 Donned by no ordinary Notre-Dame!
 For, one of the three safety-guards of France,
 You front now, lady! Nothing intercepts
 The privilege, by crow-flight, two miles far.
 She and her sisters Lourdes and La Salette
 Are at this moment hailed the cynosure
 Of poor dear France, such waves have buffeted 440
 Since she eschewed infallibility
 And chose to steer by the vague compass-box.
 This same midsummer month, a week ago,
 Was not the memorable day observed
 For reinstatement of the misused Three
 In old supremacy for evermore?
 Did not the faithful flock in pilgrimage
 By railway, diligence and steamer — nay
 On foot with staff and scrip, to see the sights
 Assured them? And I say best sight was here: 450

And nothing justified the rival Two
In their pretension to equality;
Our folk laid out their ticket-money best,
And wiseliest, if they walked, wore shoe away;
Not who went farther only to fare worse.
For, what was seen at Lourdes and La Salette
Except a couple of the common cures
Such as all three can boast of, any day?
While here it was, here and by no means there, 459
That the Pope's self sent two great real gold crowns
As thick with jewelry as thick could stick,
His present to the Virgin and her Babe —
Provided for — who knows not? — by that fund,
Count Alessandro Sforza's legacy,
Which goes to crown some Virgin every year.
But this year, poor Pope was in prison-house,
And money had to go for something else;
And therefore, though their present seemed the
Pope's,
The faithful of our province raised the sum 469
Preached and prayed out of — nowise purse alone.
Gentle and simple paid in kind, not cash,
The most part: the great lady gave her brooch,
The peasant-girl her hair-pin; 't was the rough
Bluff farmer mainly who, — admonished well
By wife to care lest his new colewort-crop
Stray sorrowfully sparse like last year's seed, —
Lugged from reluctant pouch the fifty-franc,
And had the Curé's hope that rain would cease.
And so, the sum in evidence at length,
Next step was to obtain the donative 480
By the spontaneous bounty of the Pope —
No easy matter, since his Holiness
Had turned a deaf ear, long and long ago,
To much entreaty on our Bishop's part,

Commendably we boast. "But no," quoth he,
 "Image and image needs must take their turn:
 Here stand a dozen as importunate."

Well, we were patient; but the cup ran o'er
 When — who was it pressed in and took the prize
 But our own offset, set far off indeed 490

To grow by help of our especial name,
 She of the Ravissante — in Martinique!

"What?" cried our patience at the boiling-point,
 "The daughter crowned, the mother's head goes
 bare?

Bishop of Raimboux!" — that's our diocese —

"Thou hast a summons to repair to Rome,

Be efficacious at the Council there:

Now is the time or never! Right or wrong!

Hie thee away, thou valued Morillon,

And have the promise, thou who hast the vote!" 500

So said, so done, so followed in due course

(To cut the story short) this festival,

This famous Twenty-second, seven days since.

Oh, but you heard at Joyeux! Pilgrimage,

Concourse, procession with, to head the host,

Cardinal Mirecourt, quenching lesser lights:

The leafy street-length through, decked end to end

With August-stripping, and adorned with flags

That would have waved right well but that it rained

Just this picked day, by some perversity. 510

And so were placed, on Mother and on Babe,

The pair of crowns: the Mother's, you must see!

Miranda, the great Paris goldsmith, made

The marvel, — he's a neighbor: that's his park

Before you, tree-topped wall we walk toward.

His shop it was turned out the masterpiece,

Probably at his own expenditure;

Anyhow, his was the munificence
 Contributed the central and supreme
 Splendor that crowns the crown itself, The Stone. 520
 Not even Paris, ransacked, could supply
 That gem: he had to forage in New-York,
 This jeweller, and country-gentleman,
 And most undoubted devotèe beside!
 Worthily wived, too: since his wife it was
 Bestowed "with friendly hand" — befitting phrase!
 The lace which trims the coronation-robe —
 Stiff-wear — a mint of wealth on the brocade.
 Do go and see what I saw yesterday!
 And, for that matter, see in fancy still,
 Since . . . 530

There now! Even for unthankful me,
 Who stuck to my devotions at high-tide
 That festal morning, never had a mind
 To trudge the little league and join the crowd —
 Even for me is miracle vouchsafed!
 How pointless provcs the sneer at miracles!
 As if, contrariwise to all we want
 And reasonably look to find, they graced
 Merely those graced-before, grace helps no whit,
 Unless, made whole, they need physician still. 540
 I — sceptical in every inch of me —
 Did I deserve that, from the liquid name
 "Miranda," — faceted as lovelily
 As his own gift, the gem, — a shaft should shine,
 Bear me along, another Abaris,
 Nor let me light till, lo, the Red is reached,
 And yonder lies in luminosity!

Look, lady! where I bade you glance but now!
 Next habitation, though two miles away, —

No tenement for man or beast between, — 550
 That, park and domicile, is country-seat .
 Of this same good Miranda! I accept
 The augury. Or there, or nowhere else,
 Will I establish that a Night-cap gleams
 Of visionary Red, not White for once!
 "Heaven" saith the sage "is with us, here inside
 Each man:" "Hell also," simpleness subjoins,
 By White and Red describing human flesh.

And yet as we continue, quicken pace,
 Approach the object which determines me 560
 Victorious or defeated, more forlorn
 My chance seems, — that is certainty at least.
 Halt midway, reconnoitre! Either side
 The path we traverse (turn and see) stretch fields
 Without a hedge: one level, scallop-striped
 With bands of beet and turnip and luzern,
 Limited only by each color's end,
 Shelves down, — we stand upon an eminence, —
 To where the earth-shell scallops out the sea,
 A sweep of semicircle; and at edge — 570
 Just as the milk-white incrustations stud
 At intervals some shell-extremity,
 So do the little growths attract us here,
 Towns with each name I told you: say, they
 touch
 The sea, and the sea them, and all is said,
 So sleeps and sets to slumber that broad blue!
 The people are as peaceful as the place.
 This, that I call "the path" is road, highway;
 But has there passed us by a market-cart,
 Man, woman, child, or dog to wag a tail? 580
 True, I saw weeders stooping in a field;
 But — formidably white the Cap's extent!

Round again! Come, appearance promises!
 The boundary, the park-wall, ancient brick,
 Upholds a second wall of tree-heads high
 Which overlean its top, a solid green.
 That surely ought to shut in mysteries!
 A jeweller — no insuggestive craft!
 Trade that admits of much romance, indeed.. 589
 For, whom but goldsmiths used old monarchs pledge
 Regalia to, or seek a ransom from,
 Or pray to furnish dowry, at a pinch,
 According to authentic story-books?
 Why, such have revolutionized this land
 With diamond-necklace-dealing! not to speak
 Of families turned upside-down, because
 The gay wives went and pawned clandestinely
 Jewels, and figured, till found out, with paste,
 Or else redeemed them — how, is horrible!
 Then there are those enormous criminals 600
 That love their ware and cannot lose their love,
 And murder you to get your purchase back.
 Others go courting after such a stone,
 Make it their mistress, marry for their wife,
 And find out, some day, it was false the while,
 As ever wife or mistress, man too fond
 Has named his Pilgrim, Hermit, Ace of Hearts.

Beside — what style of edifice begins
 To grow in sight at last and top the scene?
 That gray roof, with the range of *lucarnes*, four 610
 I count, and that erection in the midst —
 Clock-house, or chapel-spire, or what, above?
 Conventual, that, beyond manorial, sure!
 And reason good; for Clairvaux, such its name,
 Was built of old to be a Priory,
 Dependence on that Abbey-for-the-Males

Our Conqueror founded in world-famous Caen,
 And where his body sought the sepulture
 It was not to retain: you know the tale.
 Such Priory was Clairvaux, prosperous 620
 Hundreds of years; but nothing lasts below,
 And when the Red Cap pushed the Crown aside,
 The Priory became, like all its peers,
 A National Domain: which, bought and sold
 And resold, needs must change, with ownership,
 Both outside show and inside use; at length
 The messuage, three-and-twenty years ago,
 Became the purchase of rewarded worth
 Impersonate in Father — I must stoop
 To French phrase for precision's sake, I fear — 630
 Father Miranda, goldsmith of renown:
 By birth a Madrilene; by domicile
 And sojourning accepted French at last.
 His energy it was which, trade transferred
 To Paris, throve as with a golden thumb,
 Established in the Place Vendôme. He bought
 Not building only, but belongings far
 And wide, at Gonthier there, Monlieu, Villeneuve,
 A plentiful estate: which, twelve years since,
 Passed, at the good man's natural demise, 640
 To Son and Heir Miranda — Clairvaux here,
 The Paris shop, the mansion — not to say
 Palatial residence on Quai Rousseau,
 With money, movables, a mine of wealth —
 And young Léonce Miranda got it all.

Ah, but — whose might the transformation be?
 Were you prepared for this, now? As we talked,
 We walked, we entered the half-privacy,
 The partly-guarded precinct: passed beside
 The little paled-off islet, trees and turf, 650

Then found us in the main ash-avenue
 Under the blessing of its branchage-roof.
 Till, on emergence, what affronts our gaze?
 Priory — Conqueror — Abbey-for-the-Males —
 Hey, presto, pass, who conjured all away?
 Look through the railwork of the gate: a park
 — Yes, but *à l'Anglaise*, as they compliment!
 Grass like green velvet, gravel-walks like gold,
 Bosses of shrubs, embosomings of flowers, 659
 Lead you — through sprinkled trees of tiny breed
 Disporting, within reach of coverture,
 By some habitual acquiescent oak
 Or elm, that thinks, and lets the youngsters laugh—
 Lead, lift at last your soul that walks the air,
 Up to the house-front, or its back perhaps —
 Whether façade or no, one coquetry
 Of colored brick and carved stone! Stucco? Well,
 The daintiness is cheery, that I know,
 And all the sportive floral framework fits
 The lightsome purpose of the architect. 670
 Those *lucarnes* which I called conventual, late,
 Those are the outlets in the *mansarde*-roof;
 And, underneath, what long light elegance
 Of windows here suggests how brave inside
 Lurk eyeballed gems they play the eyelids to!
 Festive arrangements look through such, be sure!
 And now the tower a-top, I look for clock's
 Or bell's abode, turns out a quaint device,
 Pillared and temple-treated Belvedere —
 Pavilion safe within its railed-about 680
 Sublimity of area — whence what stretch
 Of sea and land, throughout the seasons' change,
 Must greet the solitary! Or suppose
 — If what the husband likes, the wife likes too —
 The happy pair of students cloistered high,

Alone in April kiss when Spring arrives!
 Or no, he mounts there by himself to meet
 Winds, welcome wafts of sea-smell, first white bird
 That flaps thus far to taste the land again,
 And all the promise of the youthful year; 690
 Then he descends, unbosoms straight his store
 Of blessings in the bud, and both embrace,
 Husband and wife, since earth is Paradise,
 And man at peace with God. You see it all?

Let us complete our survey, go right round
 The place: for here, it may be, we surprise
 The Priory, — these solid walls, big barns,
 Gray orchard-grounds, huge four-square stores for
 stock,

Betoken where the Church was busy once.
 Soon must we come upon the Chapel's self. 700
 No doubt next turn will treat us to . . . Aha,
 Again our expectation proves at fault!
 Still the bright graceful modern — not to say
 Modish adornment, meets us: *Parc Anglais*,
 Tree-sprinkle, shrub-embossment as before.
 See, the sun splits on yonder bauble world
 Of silvered glass concentrating, every side,
 All the adjacent wonder, made minute
 And touched grotesque by ball-convexity!
 Just so, a sense that something is amiss, 710
 Something is out of sorts in the display,
 Affects us, past denial, everywhere.

The right erection for the Fields, the Wood,
 (Fields — but *Elysées*, wood — but *de Boulogne*)
 Is peradventure wrong for wood and fields
 When Vire, not Paris, plays the Capital.

So may a good man have deficient taste;
 Since Son and Heir Miranda, he it was

Who, six years now elapsed, achieved the work
And truly made a wilderness to smile. 720

Here did their domesticity reside,
A happy husband and as happy wife,
Till . . . how can I in conscience longer keep
My little secret that the man is dead
I, for artistic purpose, talk about
As if he lived still? No, these two years now,
Has he been dead. You ought to sympathize,
Not mock the sturdy effort to redeem
My pledge, and wring you out some tragedy
From even such a perfect commonplace! 730

Suppose I boast the death of such desert
My tragic bit of Red? Who contravenes
Assertion that a tragedy exists
In any stoppage of benevolence,
Utility, devotion above all?

Benevolent? There never was his like:
For poverty, he had an open hand

. . . Or stop — I use the wrong expression here —
An open purse, then, ever at appeal;
So that the unreflecting rather taxed 740
Profusion than penuriousness in alms.

One, in his day and generation, deemed
Of use to the community? I trust
Clairvaux thus renovated, regalized,
Paris expounded thus to Normandy,
Answers that question. Was the man devout?

After a life — one mere munificence
To Church and all things churchly, men or mice, —
Dying, his last bequeathment gave land, goods,
Cash, every stick and stiver, to the Church, 750
And notably to that church yonder, that
Beloved of his soul, La Ravissante —
Wherefrom, the latest of his gifts, the Stone

Gratefully bore me as on arrow-flash
To Clairvaux, as I told you.

“Ay, to find

Your Red desiderated article,
Where every scratch and scrape provokes my White
To all the more superb a prominence!
Why, 't is the story served up fresh again —
How it befell the restive prophet old 760
Who came and tried to curse, but blessed the land.
Come, your last chance! he disinherited
Children: he made his widow mourn too much
By this endowment of the other Bride —
Nor understood that gold and jewelry
Adorn her in a figure, not a fact.
You make that White, I want, so very white,
'T is I say now — some trace of Red should be
Somewhere in this Miranda-sanctitude!”

Not here, at all events, sweet mocking friend! 770
For he was childless; and what heirs he had
Were an uncertain sort of Cousinry
Scarce claiming kindred so as to withhold
The donor's purpose though fantastical:
Heirs, for that matter, wanting no increase
Of wealth, since rich already as himself;
Heirs that had taken trouble off his hands,
Bought that productive goldsmith-business he,
With abnegation wise as rare, renounced
Precisely at a time of life when youth, 780
Nigh on departure, bids mid-age discard
Life's other loves and likings in a pack,
To keep, in lucre, comfort worth them all.
This Cousinry are they who boast the shop
Of “Firm-Miranda, London and New-York.”
Cousins are an unconscionable kind;

But these — pretension surely on their part
To share inheritance were too absurd!

“Remains then, he dealt wrongly by his wife,
Despoiled her somehow by such testament?” 790
Farther than ever from the mark, fair friend!
The man’s love for his wife exceeded bounds
Rather than failed the limit. ’T was to live
Hers and hers only, to abolish earth
Outside — since Paris holds the pick of earth —
He turned his back, shut eyes, stopped ears to all
Delicious Paris tempts her children with,
And fled away to this far solitude —
She peopling solitude sufficiently! 799
She, partner in each heavenward flight sublime,
Was, with each condescension to the ground,
Duly associate also: hand in hand,
. . . Or side by side, I say by preference —
On every good work sidelingly they went.
Hers was the instigation — none but she
Willed that, if death should summon first her lord,
Though she, sad relict, must drag residuc
Of days encumbered by this load of wealth —
(Submitted to with something of a grace
So long as her surviving vigilance 810
Might worthily administer, convert
Wealth to God’s glory and the good of man,
Give, as in life, so now in death, effect
To cherished purpose) — yet she begged and prayed
That, when no longer she could supervise
The House, it should become a Hospital:
For the support whereof, lands, goods and cash
Alike will go, in happy guardianship,
To yonder church, La Ravissante: who debt
To God and man undoubtedly will pay. 820

“Not of the world, your heroine!”

Do you know

I saw her yesterday — set eyes upon
 The veritable personage, no dream?
 I in the morning strolled this way, as oft,
 And stood at entry of the avenue.
 When, out from that first garden-gate, we gazed
 Upon and through, a small proceession swept —
 Madame Miranda with attendants five.
 First, of herself: she wore a soft and white
 Engaging dress, with velvet stripes and squares 830
 Severely black, yet scarce discouraging:
 Fresh Paris-manufacture! (Vire's would do?
 I doubt it, but confess my ignorance.)
 Her figure? somewhat small and darlinglike.
 Her face? well, singularly colorless,
 For first thing: which scarce suits a blonde, you
 know.

Pretty you would not call her: though perhaps
 Attaining to the ends of prettiness
 And somewhat more, suppose enough of soul.
 Then she is forty full: you cannot judge 840
 What beauty was her portion at eighteen,
 The age she married at. So, colorless
 I stick to, and if featureless I add,
 Your notion grows completer: for, although
 I noticed that her nose was aquiline,
 The whole effect amounts with me to — blank!
 I never saw what I could less describe.
 The eyes, for instance, unforgettable
 Which ought to be, are out of mind as sight.

Yet is there not conceivably a face, 850
 A set of wax-like features, blank at first,

Which, as you bendingly grow warm above,
Begins to take impressment from your breath?
Which, as your will itself were plastic here
Nor needed exercise of handicraft,
From formless moulds itself to correspond
With all you think and feel and are — in fine
Grows a new revelation of yourself,
Who know now for the first time what you want?
Here has been something that could wait awhile, 860
Learn your requirement, nor take shape before,
But, by adopting it, make palpable
Your right importance of your own,
Companions somehow were so slow to see!
— Far delicater solace to conceit
Than should some absolute and final face,
Fit representative of soul inside,
Summon you to surrender — in no way
Your breath's impressment, nor, in stranger's guise,
Yourself — or why of force to challenge you? 870
Why should your soul's reflection rule your soul?
("You" means not you, nor me, nor any one
Framed, for a reason I shall keep suppressed,
To rather want a master than a slave:
The slavish still aspires to dominate!)
So, all I say is, that the face, to me
One blur of blank, might flash significance
To who had seen his soul reflected there
By that symmetric silvery phantom-like
Figure, with other five processional. 880
The first, a black-dressed matron — maybe, maid —
Mature, and dragonish of aspect, — marched;
Then four came tripping in a joyous flock,
Two giant goats and two prodigious sheep
Pure as the arctic fox that suits the snow
Tripped, trotted, turned the march to merriment,

But ambled at their mistress' heel — for why?
 A rod of guidance marked the *Châtelaine*,
 And ever and anon would sceptre wave,
 And silky subject leave meandering. 890
 Nay, one great naked sheep-face stopped to ask
 Who was the stranger, snuffed inquisitive
 My hand that made acquaintance with its nose,
 Examined why the hand — of man at least —
 Patted so slightly, warmly, so like life!
 Are they such silly natures after all?
 And thus accompanied, the paled-off space,
 Isleted shrubs and verdure, gained the group;
 Till, as I gave a furtive glance, and saw
 Her back-hair was a block of solid gold, 900
 The gate shut out my harmless question — Hair
 So young and yellow, crowning sanctity,
 And claiming solitude . . . can hair be false?

"Shut in the hair and with it your last hope
 Yellow might on inspection pass for Red! —
 Red, Red, where is the tinge of promised Red
 In this old tale of town and country life,
 This risc and progress of a family?
 First comes the bustling man of enterprise,
 The fortune-founding father, rightly rough, 910
 As who must grub and grab, play pioneer.
 Then, with a light and airy step, succeeds
 The son, surveys the fabric of his sire
 And enters home, unsmirched from top to toe.
 Polish and education qualify
 Their fortunate possessor to confine
 His occupancy to the first-floor suite
 Rather than keep exploring needlessly
 Where dwelt his sire content with cellarage:
 Industry bustling underneath, no doubt, 920

And supervisors should not sit too close.
Next, rooms built, there's the furniture to buy,
And what adornment like a worthy wife?
In comes she like some foreign cabinet,
Purchased indeed, but purifying quick
What space receives it from all traffic-taint.
She tells of other habits, palace-life;
Royalty may have pried into those depths
Of sandal-wooded drawer, and set a-creak
That pygmy portal pranked with lazuli. 930
More fit by far the ignoble we replace
By objects suited to such visitant
Than that we desecrate her dignity
By neighborhood of vulgar table, chair,
Which haply helped old age to smoke and doze.
The end is, an exchange of city-stir
And too intrusive burgess-fellowship,
For rural isolated elegance,
Careless simplicity, how preferable!
There one may fairly throw behind one's back 940
The used-up worn-out Past, we want away,
And make a fresh beginning of stale life.
'In just the place' — does any one object? —
'Where aboriginal gentility
Will scout the upstart, twit him with each trick
Of townish trade-mark that stamps word and deed,
And most of all resent that here town-dross
He daubs with money-color to deceive!'
Rashly objected! Is there not the Church
To intercede and bring benefic truce 950
At outset? She it is shall equalize
The laborers i' the vineyard, last as first.
Pay court to her, she stops impertinence.
'Duke, once your sires crusaded it, we know:
Our friend the newcomer observes, no less,

Your chapel, rich with their emblazonry,
 Wants roofing — might he but supply the means!
 Marquise, you gave the honor of your name,
 Titular patronage, abundant will
 To what should be an Orphan Institute: 960
 Gave everything but funds, in brief; and these,
 Our friend, the lady newly resident,
 Proposes to contribute, by your leave!
 Brothers and sisters lie they in thy lap,
 Thou none-excluding, all-collecting Church!
 Sure, one has half a foot i' the hierarchy
 Of birth, when 'Nay, my dear,' laughs out the Duke,
 'I'm the crown's cushion-carrier, but the crown —
 Who gave its central glory, I or you?'
 When Marquise jokes 'My quest, forsooth? Each
 doit 970

I scrape together goes for Peter-pence
 To purvey bread and water in his bonds
 For Peter's self imprisoned — Lord, how long?
 Yours, yours alone the bounty, dear my dame,
 You plumped the purse which, poured into the plate,
 Made the Archbishop open brows so broad!
 And if you really mean to give that length
 Of lovely lace to edge the robe!' . . . Ah, friends,
 Gem better serves so than by calling crowd
 Round shop-front to admire the million's-worth! 980
 Lace gets more homage than from *lorgnette*-stare,
 And comment coarse to match (should one display
 One's robe a trifle o'er the *baignoire*-edge,)
 'Well may she line her slippers with the like,
 If minded so! their shop it was produced
 That wonderful *parure*, the other day,
 Whereof the Baron said it beggared him.'
 And so the paired Mirandas built their house,
 Enjoyed their fortune, sighed for family,

Found friends would serve their purpose quite as
well, 990

And come, at need, from Paris — anyhow,
With evident alacrity, from Vire —
Endeavor at the chase, at least succeed
In smoking, eating, drinking, laughing, and
Preferring country, oh so much to town!
Thus lived the husband; though his wife would sigh
In confidence, when Countesses were kind,
'Cut off from Paris and society!'

White, White, I once more round you in the ears!
Though you have marked it, in a corner, yours 1000
Henceforth, — Red-lettered 'Failure' very plain,
I shall acknowledge, on the snowy hem
Of ordinary Night-cap! Come, enough!
We have gone round its cotton vastitude,
Or half-round, for the end's consistent still,
A *cul-de-sac* with stoppage at the sea.
Here we return upon our steps. One look
May bid good morning — properly good night —
To civic bliss, Miranda and his mate!
Are we to rise and go?"

No, sit and stay! 1010

Now comes my moment, with the thrilling throw
Of curtain from each side a shrouded case.
Don't the rings shriek an ominous "Ha! ha!
So you take Human Nature upon trust?"
List but with like trust to an incident
Which speedily shall make quite Red enough
Burn out of yonder spotless napery!
Sit on the little mound here, whence you seize
The whole of the gay front sun-satisfied,
One laugh of color and embellishment! 1020
Because it was there, — past those laurustines,

On that smooth gravel-sweep 'twixt flowers and
sward, —

There tragic death befell; and not one grace
Outspread before you but is registered
In that sinistrous coil these last two years
Were occupied in winding smooth again.

“True?” Well, at least it was concluded so,
Sworn to be truth, allowed by Law as such
(With my concurrence, if it matter here)
A month ago: at Vire they tried the case.

1030

II

Monsieur Léonce Miranda, then, . . . but stay!
Permit me a preliminary word,
And, after, all shall go so straight to end!

Have you, the travelled lady, found yourself
Inside a ruin, fane or bath or cirque,
Renowned in story, dear through youthful dream?
If not, — imagination serves as well.
Try fancy-land, go back a thousand years,
Or forward, half the number, and confront 9
Some work of art gnawn hollow by Time's tooth,—
Hellenic temple, Roman theatre,
Gothic cathedral, Gallic Tuileries,
But ruined, one and whichsoe'er you like.
Obstructions choke what still remains intact,
Yet proffer change that 's picturesque in turn;
Since little life begins where great life ends,
And vegetation soon amalgamates,
Smooths novel shape from out the shapeless old,
Till broken column, battered cornice block
The centre with a bulk half weeds and flowers, 20
Half relics you devoutly recognize.

Devoutly recognizing, — hark, a voice
 Not to be disregarded! “Man worked here
 Once on a time; here needs again to work;
 Ruins obstruct, which man must remedy.”
 Would you demur “Let Time fulfil his task,
 And, till the scythe-sweep find no obstacle,
 Let man be patient”?

The reply were prompt:

“Glisteningly beneath the May-night moon,
 Herbage and floral coverture bedeck 30
 Yon splintered mass amidst the solitude:
 Wolves occupy the background, or some snake
 Glides by at distance; picturesque enough!
 Therefore, preserve it? Nay, pour daylight in, —
 The mound proves swarming with humanity.
 There never was a thorough solitude,
 Now you look nearer: mortal busy life
 First of all brought the crumblings down on pate,
 Which trip man’s foot still, plague his passage much,
 And prove — what seems to you so picturesque 40
 To him is . . . but experiment yourself
 On how conducive to a happy home
 Will be the circumstance your bed for base
 Boasts tessellated pavement, — equally
 Affected by the scorpion for his nest, —
 While what o’erroofs bed is an architrave,
 Marble, and not unlikely to crush man
 To mummy, should its venerable prop,
 Some fig-tree-stump, play traitor underneath.
 Be wise! Decide! For conservation’s sake, 50
 Clear the arena forthwith! lest the tread
 Of too-much-tried impatience trample out
 Solid and unsubstantial to one blank
 Mud-mixture, picturesque to nobody, —

And, task done, quarrel with the parts intact
 Whence came the filtered fine dust, whence the crash
 Bides but its time to follow. Quick conclude
 Removal, time effects so tardily,
 Of what is plain obstruction; rubbish cleared,
 Let partial-ruin stand while ruin may, 60
 And serve world's use, since use is manifold.
 Repair wreck, stanchion wall to heart's content,
 But never think of renovation pure
 And simple, which involves creation too.
 Transform and welcome! You tall tower may help
 (Though built to be a belfry and naught else)
 Some Father Secchi to tick Venus off
 In transit: never bring there bell again.
 To damage him aloft, brain us below,
 When new vibrations bury both in brick!" 70

Monsieur Léonce Miranda, furnishing
 The application at his cost, poor soul!
 Was instanced how, — because the world lay strewn
 With ravage of opinions in his path,
 And neither he, nor any friendly wit,
 Knew and could teach him which was firm, which
 frail,
 In his adventure to walk straight through life
 The partial-ruin, — in such enterprise,
 He straggled into rubbish, struggled on,
 And stumbled out again observably. 80
 "Yon buttress still can back me up," he judged:
 And at a touch down came both he and it.
 "A certain statue, I was warned against,
 Now, by good fortune, lies well under foot,
 And cannot tempt to folly any more:"
 So, lifting eye, aloft since safety lay,
 What did he light on? the Idalian shape,

The undeposed, erectly Victrix still!

“These steps ascend the labyrinthine stair
 Whence, darkling and on all-fours, out I stand 90
 Exalt and safe, and bid low earth adieu —
 For so instructs ‘Advice to who would climb:’”
 And all at once the climbing landed him
 — Where, is my story.

Take its moral first.

Do you advise a climber? Have respect
 To the poor head, with more or less of brains
 To spill, should breakage follow your advice!
 Head-break to him will be heart-break to you
 For having preached “Disturb no ruins here!
 Are not they crumbling of their own accord? 100
 Meantime, let poets, painters keep a prize!
 Beside, a sage pedestrian picks his way.”
 A sage pedestrian — such as you and I!
 What if there trip, in merry carelessness,
 And come to grief, a weak and foolish child?
 Be cautious how you counsel climbing, then!

Are you adventurous and climb yourself?
 Plant the foot warily, accept a staff,
 Stamp only where you probe the standing-point,
 Move forward, well assured that move you may: 110
 Where you mistrust advance, stop short, there stick!
 This makes advancing slow and difficult?
 Hear what comes of the endeavor of brisk youth
 To foot it fast and easy! Keep this same
 Notion of outside mound and inside mash,
 Towers yet intact round turfy rottenness,
 Symbolic partial-ravage, — keep in mind!
 Here fortune placed his feet who first of all
 Found no incumbrance, till head found . . . But
 hear!

This son and heir then of the jeweller, 120
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda, at his birth,
 Mixed the Castilian passionate blind blood
 With answerable gush, his mother's gift,
 Of spirit, French and critical and cold.
 Such mixture makes a battle in the brain,
 Ending as faith or doubt gets uppermost;
 Then will has way a moment, but no more:
 So nicely-balanced are the adverse strengths,
 That victory entails reverse next time.
 The tactics of the two are different 130
 And equalize the odds: for blood comes first,
 Surrounding life with undisputed faith.
 But presently, a new antagonist,
 By scarce-suspected passage in the dark,
 Steals spirit, fingers at each crevice found
 Athwart faith's stronghold, fronts the astonished
 man:
 "Such pains to keep me far, yet here stand I,
 Your doubt inside the faith-defence of you!"

With faith it was friends bulwarked him about
 From infancy to boyhood; so, by youth, 140
 He stood impenetrably circuited,
 Heaven-high and low as hell: what lacked he thus,
 Guarded against aggression, storm or sap?
 What foe would dare approach? Historic Doubt?
 Ay, were there some half-knowledge to attack!
 Batter doubt's best, sheer ignorance will beat.
 Acumen metaphysic? — drills its way
 Through what, I wonder! A thick feather-bed
 Of thoughtlessness, no operating tool — 149
 Framed to transpierce the flint-stone — fumbles at,
 With chance of finding an impediment!
 This Ravissante, now: when he saw the church

For the first time, and to his dying-day,
His firm belief was that the name fell fit
From the Delivering Virgin, niched and known;
As if there wanted records to attest
The appellation was a pleasantry,
A pious rendering of Rare Vissante,
The proper name which erst our province bore.
He would have told you that Saint Aldabert 160
Founded the church, (Heaven early favored France,)
About the second century from Christ;
Though the true man was Bishop of Raimboux,
Eleventh in succession, Eldobert,
Who flourished after some six hundred years.
He it was brought the image "from afar,"
(Made out of stone the place produces still)
"Infantine Art divinely artless," (Art
In the decrepitude of Decadence,)
And set it up a-working miracles 170
Until the Northmen's fury laid it low,
Not long, however: an egregious sheep,
Zelous with scratching hoof and routing horn,
Unearthed the image in good Mailleville's time,
Count of the country. "If the tale be false,
Why stands it carved above the portal plain?"
Monsieur Léonce Miranda used to ask.
To Londres went the prize in solemn pomp,
But, liking old abode and loathing new, 179
Was borne — this time, by angels — back again.
And, reinaugurated, miracle
Succeeded miracle, a lengthy list,
Until indeed the culmination came —
Archbishop Chaumont prayed a prayer and vowed
A vow — gained prayer and paid vow properly —
For the conversion of Prince Vertgalant.
These facts, sucked in along with mother's-milk,

Monsieur Léonce Miranda would dispute
 As soon as that his hands were flesh and bone,
 Milk-nourished two-and-twenty years before. 190
 So fortified by blind Castilian blood,
 What say you to the chances of French cold
 Critical spirit, should Voltaire besiege
 "Alp, Apennine, and fortified redoubt"?
 Ay, would such spirit please to play faith's game
 Faith's way, attack where faith defends so well!
 But then it shifts, tries other strategy.
 Coldness grows warmth, the critical becomes
 Unquestioning acceptance. "Share and share
 Alike in facts, to truth add other truth! 200
 Why with old truth needs new truth disagree?"

Thus doubt was found invading faith, this time,
 By help of not the spirit but the flesh:
 Fat Rabelais chuckled, where faith lay in wait
 For lean Voltaire's grimace — French, either foe.
 Accordingly, while round about our friend
 Ran faith without a break which learned eye
 Could find at two-and-twenty years of age,
 The twenty-two-years-old frank footstep soon
 Assured itself there spread a standing-space 210
 Flowery and comfortable, nowise rock
 Nor pebble-pavement roughed for champion's tread
 Who scorns discomfort, pacing at his post.
 Tall, long-limbed, shoulder right and shoulder left,
 And 'twixt *acromia* such a latitude,
 Black heaps of hair on head, and blacker bush
 O'er-rioting chin, cheek and throat and chest, —
 His brown meridional temperament
 Told him — or rather pricked into his sense 219
 Plainer than language — "Pleasant station here!
 Youth, strength, and lustihood can sleep on turf

Yet pace the stony platform afterward:
First signal of a foe and up they start!
Saint Eldobert, at all such vanity,
Nay — sinfulness, had shaken head austere.
Had he? But did Prince Vertgalant? And yet,
After how long a slumber, of what sort,
Was it, he stretched octogenary joints
And, nigh on Day-of-Judgment trumpet-blast,
Jumped up and manned wall, brisk as any bee?" 230

Nor Rabelais nor Voltaire, but Sganarelle,
You comprehend, was pushing through the chink!
That stager in the saint's correct costume,
Who ever has his speech in readiness
For thickhead juvenility at fault:
"Go pace yon platform and play sentinel!
You won't? The worse! but still a worse might hap.
Stay then, provided that you keep in sight
The battlement, one bold leap lands you by!
Resolve not desperately 'Wall or turf, 240
Choose, this, choose that, but no alternative!'
No! Earth left once were left for good and all:
'With Heaven you may accommodate yourself.'"

Saint Eldobert — I much approve his mode;
With sinner Vertgalant I sympathize;
But histrionic Sganarelle, who prompts
While pulling back, refuses yet concedes, —
Whether he preach in chair, or print in book,
Or whisper due sustainment to weak flesh,
Counting his sham beads threaded on a lie — 250
Surely, one should bid pack that mountebank!
Surely, he must have momentary fits
Of self-sufficient stage-forgetfulness,
Escapings of the actor-lassitude

When he allows the grace to show the grin,
 Which ought to let even thickheads recognize
 (Through all the busy and benefic part, —
 Bridge-building, or rock-riving, or good clean
 Transport of church and congregation both
 From this to that place with no harm at all,) 260
 The Devil, that old stager, at his trick
 Of general utility, who leads
 Downward, perhaps, but fiddles all the way!

Therefore, no sooner does our candidate
 For saintship spotlessly emerge soul-cleansed
 From First Communion to mount guard at post,
 Paris-proof, top to toe, than up there starts
 The Spirit of the Boulevard — you know Who —
 With jocund “So, a structure fixed as fate, 269
 Faith’s tower joins on to tower, no ring more round,
 Full fifty years at distance, too, from youth!
 Once reach that precinct and there fight your best,
 As looking back you wonder what has come
 Of daisy-dappled turf you danced across!
 Few flowers that played with youth shall pester age,
 However age esteem the courtesy;
 And Eldobert was something past his prime,
 Stocked Caen with churches ere he tried hand here.
 Saint-Sauveur, Notre-Dame, Saint-Pierre, Saint-
 Jean

Attest his handiwork commenced betimes. 280
 He probably would preach that turf is mud.
 Suppose it mud, through mud one picks a way,
 And when, clay-clogged, the struggler steps to stone,
 He uncakes shoe, arrives in manlier guise
 Then carried pick-a-back by Eldobert
 Big-baby fashion, lest his leathers leak!
 All that parade about Prince Vertgalant

Amounts to — your Castilian helps enough —
Inveni ovem quæ perierat:

But ask the pretty votive statue-thing 290
 What the lost sheep's meantime amusements were
 Till the Archbishop found him! That stays blank:
 They washed the fleece well and forgot the rest.
 Make haste, since time flies, to determine, though!"

Thus opportunely took up parable, —
 Admonishing Miranda just emerged
 Pure from The Ravissante and Paris-proof, —
 Saint Sganarelle; then slipped aside, changed mask.
 And made re-entry as a gentleman
 Born of the Boulevard, with another speech 300
 I spare you.

So, the year or two revolved,
 And ever the young man was dutiful
 To altar and to hearth: had confidence
 In the whole Ravissantish history.
 Voltaire? Who ought to know so much of him, —
 Old sciolist, whom only boys think sage, —
 As one whose father's house upon the Quai
 Neighbored the very house where that Voltaire
 Died mad and raving, not without a burst
 Of squibs and crackers too significant? 310
 Father and mother hailed their best of sons,
 Type of obedience, domesticity,
 Never such an example inside doors!
 Outside, as well not keep too close a watch;
 Youth must be left to some discretion there.
 And what discretion proved, I find deposed
 At Vire, confirmed by his own words: to wit,
 How, with the sprightliness of twenty-five,
 Five — and not twenty, for he gave their names
 With laudable precision — were the few 320

Appointed by him unto mistress-ship;
 While, meritoriously the whole long week
 A votary of commerce only, week
 Ended, "at shut of shop on Saturday,
 Do I, as is my wont, get drunk," he writes
 In airy record to a confidant.
 "Bragging and lies!" replied the apologist:
 "And do I lose by that?" laughed Somebody
 At the Court-edge a-tiptoe, mid the crowd,
 In his own clothes, a-listening to men's Law. 330

Thus while, prospectively a combatant,
 The volunteer bent brows, clenched jaws, and fierce
 Whistled the march-tune "Warrior to the wall!"
 Something like flowery laughter round his feet
 Tangled him of a sudden with "Sleep first!"
 And fairly flat upon the turf sprawled he
 And let strange creatures make his mouth their home.

Anyhow, 't is the nature of the soul
 To seek a show of durability,
 Nor, changing, plainly be the slave of change. 340
 Outside the turf, the towers: but, round the turf,
 A tent may rise, a temporary shroud,
 Mock-faith to suit a mimic dwelling-place:
 Tent which, while screening jollity inside
 From the external circuit — evermore
 A menace to who lags when he should march —
 Yet stands a-tremble, ready to collapse
 At touch of foot: turf is acknowledged grass,
 And grass, though pillowy, held contemptible
 Compared with solid rock, the rampired ridge. 350
 To truth a pretty homage thus we pay
 By testifying — what we dally with,
 Falsehood, (which, never fear we take for truth!)

We may enjoy, but then — how we despise!
Accordingly, on weighty business bound,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda stooped to play,
But, with experience, soon reduced the game
To principles, and thenceforth played by rule:
Rule, dignifying sport as sport, proclaimed
No less that sport was sport and nothing more. 360
He understood the worth of womankind, —
To furnish man — provisionally — sport:
Sport transitive — such earth's amusements are:
But, seeing that amusements pall by use,
Variety therein is requisite.

And since the serious work of life were wronged
Should we bestow importance on our play,
It follows, in such womankind-pursuit,
Cheating is lawful chase. We have to spend
An hour — they want a lifetime thrown away: 370
We seek to tickle sense — they ask for soul,
As if soul had no higher ends to serve!
A stag-hunt gives the royal creature law,
Bat-fowling is all fair with birds at roost,
The lantern and the clapnet suit the hedge.
Which must explain why, bent on Boulevard game,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda decently
Was prudent in his pleasure — passed himself
Off on the fragile fair about his path
As the gay devil rich in mere good looks, 380
Youth, hope — what matter though the purse be
void?

“If I were only young Miranda, now,
Instead of a poor clerkly drudge at desk
All day, poor artist vainly bruising brush
On palette, poor musician scraping gut
With horsehair teased that no harmonics come!
Then would I love with liberality,

Then would I pay! — who now shall be repaid,
 Repaid alike for present pain and past,
 If Mademoiselle permit the contre-danse, 390
 Sing 'Gay in garret youth at twenty lives,'
 And afterward accept a lemonade!"

Such sweet facilities of intercourse
 Afford the Winter-Garden and Mabilles!
 "Oh, I unite" — runs on the confidence,
 Poor fellow, that was read in open Court,
 — "Amusement with discretion: never fear
 My *escapades* cost more than market-price!
 No durably-attached Miranda-dupe,
 Sucked dry of substance by two clinging lips, 400
 Promising marriage, and performing it!
 Trust me, I know the world, and know myself,
 And know where duty takes me — in good time!"

Thus fortified and realistic, then,
 At all points thus against illusion armed,
 He wisely did New Year inaugurate
 By playing truant to the favored five:
 And sat installed at "The Varieties," —
 Playhouse appropriately named, — to note
 (Prying amid the turf that's flowery there) 410
 What primrose, firstling of the year, might push
 The snows aside to deck his button-hole —
 Unnoticed by that outline sad, severe,
 (Though fifty good long years removed from youth)
 That tower and tower, — our image, bear in mind!

No sooner was he seated than, behold,
 Out burst a polyanthus! He was 'ware
 Of a young woman nighed in neighborhood;
 And ere one moment flitted, fast was he
 Found captive to the beauty evermore, 420

For life, for death, for heaven, for hell, her own.
Philosophy, bewail thy fate! Adieu,
Youth realistic and illusion-proof!
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, — hero late
Who “understood the worth of womankind,”
“Who found therein — provisionally — sport,” —
Felt, in the flitting of a moment, fool
Was he, and folly all that seemed so wise,
And the best proof of wisdom’s birth would be
That he made all endeavor, body, soul, 430
By any means, at any sacrifice
Of labor, wealth, repute, and (— well, the time
For choosing between heaven on earth, and heaven
In heaven, was not at hand immediately —)
Made all endeavor, without loss incurred
Of one least minute, to obtain her love.
“Sport transitive?” “Variety required?”
“In loving were a lifetime thrown away?”
How singularly may young men mistake!
The fault must be repaired with energy. 440

Monsieur Léonce Miranda ate her up
With eye-devouring; when the unconscious fair
Passed from the close-packed hall, he pressed behind;
She mounted vehicle, he did the same,
Coach stopped, and cab fast followed, at one door —
Good house in unexceptionable street.
Out stepped the lady, — never think, alone!
A mother was not wanting to the maid,
Or, may be, wife or widow, might one say?
Out stepped and properly down flung himself 450
Monsieur Léonce Miranda at her feet —
And never left them after, so to speak,
For twenty years, till his last hour of life,
When he released them, as precipitate.

Love proffered and accepted then and there!
Such potency in word and look has truth.

Truth I say, truth I mean: this love was true,
And the rest happened by due consequence.
By which we are to learn that there exists
A falsish false, for truth 's inside the same, 460
And truth that 's only half true, falsish truth.
The better for both parties! folk may taunt
That half your rock-built wall is rubble-heap:
Answer them, half their flowery turf is stones!
Our friend had hitherto been decking coat
If not with stones, with weeds that stones befit,
With dandelions — “primrose-buds,” smirked he;
This proved a polyanthus on his breast,
Prize-lawful or prize-lawless, flower the same.
So with his other instance of mistake: 470
Was Christianity the Ravissante?

And what a flower of flowers he chanced on now!
To primrose, polyanthus I prefer
As illustration, from the fancy-fact
That out of simple came the composite
By culture: that the florist bedded thick
His primrose-root in ruddle, bullock's blood,
Ochre and devils'-dung, for aught I know,
Until the pale and pure grew fiery-fine,
Ruby and topaz, rightly named anew. 480
This lady was no product of the plain;
Social manure had raised a rarity.
Clara de Millefleurs (note the happy name)
Blazed in the full-blown glory of her Spring.
Peerlessly perfect, form and face: for both —
“Imagine what, at seventeen, may have proved
Miss Pages, the actress: Pages herself, my dear!”

Noble she was, the name denotes: and rich?
“The apartment in this Coliseum Street,
Furnished, my dear, with such an elegance, 490
Testifies wealth, my dear, sufficiently!
What quality, what style and title, eh?
Well now, waive nonsense, you and I are boys
No longer: somewhere must a screw be slack!
Don’t fancy, Duchesses descend at door
From carriage-step to stranger prostrate stretched,
And bid him take heart, and deliver mind,
March in and make himself at ease forthwith, —
However broad his chest and black his beard,
And comely his belongings, — all through love 500
Protested in a world of ways save one
Hinting at marriage!” — marriage which yet means
Only the obvious method, easiest help
To satisfaction of love’s first demand,
That love endure eternally: “my dear,
Somewhere or other must a screw be slack!”

Truth is the proper policy: from truth —
Whate’er the force wherewith you fling your
speech, —
Be sure that speech will lift you, by rebound,
Somewhere above the lowness of a lie! 510
Monsieur Léonce Miranda heard too true
A tale — perhaps I may subjoin, too trite!
As the meek martyr takes her statued stand
Above our pity, claims our worship just
Because of what she puts in evidence,
Signal of suffering, badge of torture borne
In days gone by, shame then but glory now,
Barb, in the breast, turned aureole for the front!
So, half timidity, composure half,
Clara de Millefleurs told her martyrdom. 520

Of poor though noble parentage, deprived
 Too early of a father's guardianship,
 What wonder if the prodigality
 Of nature in the girl, whose mental gifts
 Matched her external dowry, form and face —
 If these suggested a too prompt resource
 To the resourceless mother? "Try the Stage
 And so escape starvation! Prejudice
 Defames Mimetic Art: be yours to prove
 That gold and dross may meet and never mix, 530
 Purity plunge in pitch yet soil no plume!"

All was prepared in London — (you conceive
 The natural shrinking from publicity
 In Paris, where the name excites remark)
 London was ready for the grand *début*;
 When some perverse ill-fortune, incident
 To art mimetic, some malicious thrust
 Of Jealousy who sidles 'twixt the scenes
 Or pops up sudden from the prompter's hole, —
 Somehow the brilliant bubble bursts in suds. 540
 Want followed: in a foreign land, the pair!
 O hurry over the catastrophe —
 Mother too sorely tempted, daughter tried .
 Scarcely so much as circumvented, say!
 Caged unsuspecting artless innocence!

Monsieur Léonce Miranda tell the rest! —
 The rather that he told it in a style
 To puzzle Court Guide students, much more me.
 "Brief, she became the favorite of Lord N.,
 An aged but illustrious Duke, thereby 550
 Breaking the heart of his competitor
 The Prince of O. Behold her palaced straight
 In splendor, clothed in diamonds" (phrase how fit!),

“Giving tone to the City by the Thames!
Lord N., the aged but illustrious Duke,
Was even on the point of wedding her,
Giving his name to her” (why not to us?)
“But that her better angel interposed.
She fled from such a fate to Paris back,
A fortnight since: conceive Lord N.’s despair! 560
Duke as he is, there’s no invading France.
He must restrict pursuit to postal plague
Of writing letters daily, duly read
As darlingly she hands them to myself,
The privileged supplanter, who therewith
Light a cigar and see abundant blue” —
(Either of heaven or else Havanna-smoke.)
“Think! she, who helped herself to diamonds late,
In passion of disinterestedness
Now — will accept no tribute of my love 570
Beyond a paltry ring, three Louis’-worth!
Little she knows I have the rummaging
Of old Papa’s shop in the Place Vendôme!”
So wrote entrancedly to confidant
Monsieur Léonce Miranda. Surely now,
If Heaven, that sees all, understands no less,
It finds temptation pardonable here,
It mitigates the promised punishment,
It recognizes that to tarry just
An April hour amid such dainty turf 580
Means no rebellion against task imposed
Of journey to the distant wall one day?
Monsieur Léonce Miranda puts the case!
Love, he is purposed to renounce, abjure;
But meanwhile, is the case a common one?
Is it the vulgar sin, none hates as he?
Which question, put directly to “his dear”
(His brother — I will tell you in a trice)

Was doubtless meant, by due meandering,
 To reach, to fall not unobserved before 590
 The auditory cavern 'neath the cope
 Of Her, the placable, the Ravissante.
 But here 's the drawback, that the image smiles,
 Smiles on, smiles ever, says to suppliant
 "Ay, ay, ay" — like some kindly weathercock
 Which, stuck fast at Set Fair, Favonian Breeze,
 Still warrants you from rain, though Auster's lead
 Bring down the sky above your cloakless mirth.
 Had he proposed this question to, nor "dear"
 Nor Ravissante, but prompt to the Police, 600
 The Commissary of his Quarter, now —
 There had been shaggy eyebrows elevate
 With twinkling apprehension in each orb
 Beneath, and when the sudden shut of mouth
 Relaxed, — lip pressing lip, lest out should plump
 The pride of knowledge in too frank a flow, —
 Then, fact on fact forthcoming, dose were dealt
 Of truth remedial in sufficiency
 To save a chicken threatened with the pip,
 Head-staggers and a tumble from its perch. 610

Alack, it was the lady's self that made
 The revelation, after certain days
 — Nor so unwisely! As the haschisch-man
 Prepares a novice to receive his drug,
 Adroitly hides the soil with sudden spread
 Of carpet ere he seats his customer:
 Then shows him how to smoke himself about
 With Paradise; and only when, at puff
 Of pipe, the Houri dances round the brain
 Of dreamer, does he judge no need is now 620
 For circumspection and punctiliousness;
 He may resume the serviceable scrap

That made the votary unaware of muck.
Just thus the lady, when her brewage — love —
Was well a-fume about the novice-brain,
Saw she might boldly pluck from underneath
Her lover the preliminary lie.

Clara de Millefleurs, of the noble race,
Was Lucie Steiner, child to Dominique
And Magdalen Commercy; born at Sierck, 630
About the bottom of the Social Couch.
The father having come and gone again,
The mother and the daughter found their way
To Paris, and professed mode-merchandise,
Were milliners, we English roughlier say;
And soon a fellow-lodger in the house,
Monsieur Ulysse Muhlhausen, young and smart,
Tailor by trade, perceived his housemate's youth,
Smartness, and beauty over and above. 639
Courtship was brief, and marriage followed quick,
And quicklier — impecuniosity.
The young pair quitted Paris to reside
At London: which repaid the compliment
But scurvily, since not a whit the more
Trade prospered by the Thames than by the Seine.
Failing all other, as a last resource,
"He would have trafficked in his wife," — she said.
If for that cause they quarrelled, 't was, I fear,
Rather from reclamation of her rights
To wifely independence, than as wronged 650
Otherwise by the course of life proposed:
Since, on escape to Paris back again
From horror and the husband, — ill-exchanged
For safe maternal home recovered thus, —
I find her domiciled and dominant
In that apartment, Coliseum Street,

Where all the splendid magic met and mazed
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda's venturous eye.
 Only, the same was furnished at the cost
 Of some one notable in days long since, 660
 Carlino Centofanti: he it was
 Found entertaining unawares — if not
 An angel, yet a youth in search of one.
 Why this revealment after reticence?
 Wherefore, beginning "Millefleurs," end at all
 Steiner, Muhlhausen, and the ugly rest?
 Because the unsocial purse-comptrolling wight,
 Carlino Centofanti, — made aware
 By misadventure that his bounty, crumbs
 From table, comforted a visitant, — 670
 Took churlish leave, and left, too, debts to pay.
 Loaded with debts, the lady needs must bring
 Her soul to bear assistance from a friend
 Beside that paltry ring, three Louis'-worth;
 And therefore might the little circumstance
 That Monsieur Léonce had the rummaging
 Of Old Papa's shop in the Place Vendôme
 Pass, perhaps, not so unobservably.

Frail shadow of a woman in the flesh,
 These very eyes of mine saw yesterday, 680
 Would I re-tell this story of your woes,
 Would I have heart to do you detriment
 By pinning all this shame and sorrow plain
 To that poor *chignon*, — staying with me still,
 Though form and face have well-nigh faded now, —
 But that men read it, rough in brutal print,
 As two years since some functionary's voice
 Rattled all this — and more by very much —
 Into the ear of vulgar Court and crowd?
 Whence, by reverberation, rumblings grew 690

To what had proved a week-long roar in France,
 Had not the dreadful cannonry drowned all.
 Was, now, the answer of your advocate
 More than just this? "The shame fell long ago,
 The sorrow keeps increasing: God forbid
 We judge man by the faults of youth in age!"
 Permit me the expression of a hope
 Your youth proceeded like your avenue,
 Stepping by bush, and tree, and taller tree,
 Until, columnar, at the house they end. 700
 So might your creeping youth columnar rise
 And reach, by year and year, symmetrical,
 To where all shade stops short, shade's service done.
 Bushes on either side, and boughs above,
 Darken, deform the path else sun would streak;
 And, cornered half-way somewhere, I suspect
 Stagnation and a horse-pond: hurry past!
 For here's the house, the happy half-and-half
 Existence — such as stands for happiness
 True and entire, howe'er the squcamish talk! 710
 Twenty years long, you may have loved this man;
 He must have loved you; that's a pleasant life,
 Whatever was your right to lead the same.
 The white domestic pigeon pairs secure,
 Nay, does mere duty by bestowing egg
 In authorized compartment, warm and safe,
 Boarding about, and gilded spire above,
 Hoisted on pole, to dogs' and cats' despair!
 But I have spied a veriest trap of twigs
 On tree-top, every straw a thievery, 720
 Where the wild dove — despite the fowler's snare,
 The sportman's shot, the urchin's stone, — crooned
 gay,
 And solely gave her heart to what she hatched,
 Nor minded a malignant world below.

I throw first stone forsooth? 'Tis mere assault
 Of playful sugarplum against your cheek,
 Which, if it makes cheek tingle, wipes off rouge!
You, my worst woman? Ah, that touches pride,
 Puts on his mettle the exhibitor 729
 Of Night-caps, if you taunt him "This, no doubt, —
 Now we have got to Female-garniture, —
 Crowns your collection, Reddest of the row!"
 O unimaginative ignorance
 Of what dye's depth keeps best apart from worst
 In womankind! — how heaven's own pure may seem
 To blush aurorally beside such blanched
 Divineness as the women-wreaths named White:
 While hell, eruptive and fuliginous,
 Sickens to very pallor as I point
 Her place to a Red clout called woman too! 740
 Hail, heads that ever had such glory once
 Touch you a moment, like God's cloven tongues
 Of fire! your lambent aureoles lost may leave
 You marked yet, dear beyond true diadems:
 And hold, each foot, nor spurn, to man's disgrace,
 What other twist of fetid rag may fall!
 Let slink into the sewer the cupping-cloth!

Lucie, much solaced, I re-finger you,
 The medium article; if ruddy-marked
 With iron-mould, your cambric, — clean at least 750
 From poison-speck of rot and purulence.
 Lucie Muhlhausen said — "such thing am I:
 Love me, or love me not!" Miranda said
 "I do love, more than ever, most for this."
 The revelation of the very truth
 Proved the concluding necessary shake
 Which bids the tardy mixture crystallize
 Or else stay ever liquid: shoot up shaft,

Durably diamond, or evaporate —
 Sluggish solution through a minute's slip. 760
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda took his soul
 In both his hands, as if it were a vase,
 To see what came of the convulsion there,
 And found, amid subsidence, love new-born
 So sparkingly resplendent, old was new.
 "Whatever be my lady's present, past,
 Or future, this is certain of my soul,
 I love her: in despite of all I know,
 Defiance of the much I have to fear,
 I venture happiness on what I hope, 770
 And love her from this day for evermore:
 No prejudice to old profound respect
 For certain Powers! I trust they bear in mind
 A most peculiar case, and straighten out
 What's crooked there, before we close accounts.
 Renounce the world for them — some day I will:
 Meantime, to me let her become the world!"

Thus mutely might our friend soliloquize
 Over the tradesmen's bills, his Clara's gift —
 In the apartment, Coliseum Street, 780
 Carlino Centofanti's legacy,
 Provided rent and taxes were discharged —
 In face of Steiner now, De Millefleurs once,
 The tailor's wife and runaway confessed.

On such a lady if election light,
 (According to a social prejudice)
 If henceforth "all the world" she constitute
 For any lover, — needs must he renounce
 Our world in ordinary, walked about
 By couples loving as its laws prescribe, — 790
 Renunciation sometimes difficult.

But, in this instance, time and place and thing
 Combined to simplify experiment,
 And make Miranda, in the current phrase,
 Master the situation passably.

For first facility, his brother died —
 Who was, I should have told you, confidant,
 Adviser, referee and substitute,
 All from a distance: but I knew how soon
 This younger brother, lost in Portugal, 800
 Had to depart and leave our friend at large.
 Cut off abruptly from companionship
 With brother-soul of bulk about as big,
 (Obvious recipient — by intelligence
 And sympathy, poor little pair of souls —
 Of much affection and some foolishness)
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda, meant to lean
 By nature, needs must shift the leaning-place
 To his love's bosom from his brother's neck,
 Or fall flat unrelieved of freight sublime. 810

Next died the lord of the Aladdin's cave,
 Master o' the mint and keeper of the keys
 Of chests chokeful with gold and silver changed
 By Art to forms where wealth forgot itself,
 And caskets where reposed each pullet-egg
 Of diamond, slipping flame from fifty slants.
 In short, the father of the family
 Took his departure also from our scene,
 Leaving a fat succession to his heir
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda, — "fortunate 820
 If ever man was, in a father's death,"
 (So commented the world, — not he, too kind,
 Could that be, rather than scarce kind enough)
 Indisputably fortunate so far,

That little of incumbrance in his path,
Which money kicks aside, would lie there long.

And finally, a rough but wholesome shock,
An accident which comes to kill or cure,
A jerk which mends a dislocated joint!
Such happy chance, at cost of twinge, no doubt, 830
Into the socket back again put truth,
And stopped the limb from longer dragging lie.
For love suggested "Better shamle on,
And bear your lameness with what grace you may!"
And but for this rude wholesome accident,
Continuance of disguise and subterfuge,
Retention of first falsehood as to name
And nature in the lady, might have proved
Too necessary for abandonment.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda probably 840
Had else been loath to cast the mask aside,
So politic, so self-preservative,
Therefore so pardonable — though so wrong!
For see the bugbear in the background! Breathe
But ugly name, and wind is sure to waft
The husband news of the wife's whereabouts:
From where he lies perdue in London town,
Forth steps the needy tailor on the stage,
Deity-like from dusk machine of fog,
And claims his consort, or his consort's worth 850
In rubies which her price is far above.
Hard to propitiate, harder to oppose, —
Who but the man's self came to banish fear,
A pleasant apparition, such as shocks
A moment, tells a tale, then goes for good!

Monsieur Ulysse Muhlhausen proved no less
Nor more than "Gustave," lodging opposite

Monsieur Léonce Miranda's diamond-cave
 And ruby-mine, and lacking little thence
 Save that its gnome would keep the captive safe, 860
 Never return his Clara to his arms.
 For why? He was become the man in vogue,
 The indispensable to who went clothed
 Nor cared encounter Paris-fashion's blame, —
 Such miracle could London absence work.
 Rolling in riches — so translate "the vogue" —
 Rather his object was to keep off claw
 Should griffin scent the gold, should wife lay claim
 To lawful portion at a future day,
 Than tempt his partner from her private spoils. 870
 Best forage each for each, nor coupled hunt!

Pursuantly, one morning, — knock at door
 With knuckle, dry authoritative cough,
 And easy stamp of foot, broke startlingly
 On household slumber, Coliseum Street:
 "Admittance in the name of Law!" In marched
 The Commissary and subordinate.
 One glance sufficed them. "A marital pair:
 We certify, and bid good morning, sir!
 Madame, a thousand pardons." Whereupon 880
 Monsieur Ulysse Muhlhausen, otherwise
 Called "Gustave" for conveniency of trade,
 Depositing in due form complaint of wrong,
 Made his demand of remedy — divorce
 From bed, board, share of name, and part in goods.
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda owned his fault,
 Protested his pure ignorance, from first
 To last, of rights infringed in "Gustave's" case:
 Submitted him to judgment. Law decreed
 "Body and goods be henceforth separate!" 890
 And thereupon each party took its way,

This right, this left, rejoicing, to abide
 Estranged yet amicable, opposites
 In life as in respective dwelling-place.
 Still does one read on his establishment
 Huge-lettered "Gustave," — gold out-glittering
 "Miranda, goldsmith," just across the street —
 "A first-rate hand at riding-habits" — say
 The instructed — "special cut of chamber-robcs."

Thus by a rude in seeming — rightlier judged 900
 Beneficent surprise, publicity
 Stopped further fear and trembling, and what tale
 Cowardice thinks a covert: one bold splash
 Into the mid-shame, and the shiver ends,
 Though cramp and drowning may begin perhaps.

To cite just one more point which crowned success:
 Madame, Miranda's mother, most of all
 An obstacle to his projected life
 In license, as a daughter of the Church,
 Duteous, exemplary, severe by right — 910
 Moreover one most thoroughly beloved
 Without a rival till the other sort
 Possessed her son, — first storm of anger spent,
 She seemed, though grumblingly and grudgingly,
 To let be what needs must be, acquiesce.
 "With Heaven — accommodation possible!"
 Saint Sganarelle had preached with such effect,
 She saw now mitigating circumstance.
 "The erring one was most unfortunate,
 No question: but worse Magdalens repent. 920
 Were Clara free, did only Law allow,
 What fitter choice in marriage could have made
 Léonce or anybody?" 'T is alleged
 And evidenced, I find, by advocate

"Never did she consider such a tie
 As baleful, springe to snap whate'er the cost."
 And when the couple were in safety once
 At Clairvaux, motherly, considerate,
 She shrank not from advice. "Since safe you be,
 Safely abide! for winter, I know well, 936
 Is troublesome in a cold country-house.
 I recommend the south room, that we styled,
 Your sire and I, the winter-chamber."

Chance
 Or purpose, — who can read the mystery? —
 Combined, I say, to bid "Entrench yourself,
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda, on this turf,
 About this flower, so firmly that, as tent
 Rises on every side around you both,
 The question shall become, — Which arrogates
 Stability, this tent or those far towers? 940
 May not the temporary structure suit
 The stable circuit, co-exist in peace? —
 Always until the proper time, no fear!
 'Lay flat your tent!' is easier said than done."

So, with the best of auspices, betook
 Themselves Léonce Miranda and his bride —
 Provisionary — to their Clairvaux house,
 Never to leave it — till the proper time.

I told you what was Clairvaux-Priory
 Ere the improper time: an old demesne 950
 With memories, — relic half, and ruin whole, —
 The very place, then, to repair the wits
 Worn out with Paris-traffic, when its lord,
 Miranda's father, took his month of ease
 Purchased by industry. What contrast here!
 Repose, and solitude, and healthy ways.

That ticking at the back of head, he took
For motion of an inmate, stopped at once,
Proved nothing but the pavement's rattle left
Behind at Paris: here was holiday.

960

Welcome the quaint succeeding to the spruce,
The large and lumbersome and — might he breathe
In whisper to his own ear — dignified

And gentry-fashioned old-style haunts of sleep!
Palatial gloomy chambers for parade,

And passage-lengths of lost significance,
Never constructed as receptacle,

At his odd hours, for him their actual lord

By dint of diamond-dealing, goldsmithry.

969

Therefore Miranda's father chopped and changed

Nor roof-tile nor yet floor-brick, undismayed

By rains a-top or rats at bottom there.

Such contrast is so piquant for a month!

But now arrived quite other occupants

Whose cry was "Permanency, — life and death

Here, here, not elsewhere, change is all we dread!"

Their dwelling-place must be adapted, then,

To inmates, no mere truants from the town,

No temporary sojourners, forsooth,

At Clairvaux: change it into Paradise!

980

Fair friend, — who listen and let talk, alas! —

You would, in even such a state of things,

Pronounce, — or am I wrong? — for bidding stay

The old-world inconvenience, fresh as found.

All folk of individuality

Prefer to be reminded now and then,

Though at the cost of vulgar cosiness,

That the shell-outside only harbors man

The vital and progressive, meant to build,

When build he may, with quite a difference,

990

Some time, in that far land we dream about,
Where every man is his own architect.

But then the couple here in question, each

At one in project for a happy life,

Were by no acceptance of the word

So individual that they must aspire

To architecture all-appropriate

And, therefore, in this world impossible:

They needed house to suit the circumstance,

Proprietors, not tenants for a term.

1000

Despite a certain marking, here and there,

Of fleecy black or white distinguishment,

These vulgar sheep wore the flock's uniform.

They love the country, *they* renounce the town?

They gave a kick, as our Italians say,

To Paris ere it turned and kicked themselves!

Acquaintances might prove too hard to seek,

Or the reverse of hard to find, perchance,

Since Monsieur Gustave's apparition there.

And let me call remark upon the list

1010

Of notabilities invoked, in Court

At Vire, to witness, by their phrases culled

From correspondence, what was the esteem

Of those we pay respect to, for "the pair

Whereof they knew the inner life," 't is said.

Three, and three only, answered the appeal.

First, Monsieur Vaillant, music-publisher,

"Begs Madame will accept civilities."

Next, Alexandre Dumas, — sire, not son, —

"Sends compliments to Madame and to you." 1020

And last — but now prepare for England's voice!

I will not mar nor make — here's word for word —

"A rich proprietor of Paris, he

To whom belonged that bcauteous *Bagatelle*

Close to the wood of Boulogne, Hertford hight,

Assures of homages and compliments
 Affectionate" — not now Miranda but
 "Madame Muhlhausen." (Was this friend, the
 Duke

Redoutable in rivalry before?)
 Such was the evidence when evidence 1030
 Was wanted, then if ever, to the worth
 Whereat acquaintances in Paris prized
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda's household charm.
 No wonder, then, his impulse was to live,
 In Norman solitude, the Paris life:
 Surround himself with Art transported thence,
 And nature like those famed Elysian Fields:
 Then, warm up the right color out of both,
 By Boulevard friendships tempted to come taste
 How Paris lived again in little there. 1040

Monsieur Léonce Miranda practised Art.
 Do let a man for once live as man likes!
 Politics? Spend your life, to spare the world's:
 Improve each unit by some particle
 Of joy the more, deteriorate the orb
 Entire, your own: poor profit, dismal loss!
 Write books, paint pictures, or make music — since
 Your nature leans to such life-exercise!
 Ay, but such exercise begins too soon,
 Concludes too late, demands life whole and sole 1050
 Artistry being battle with the age
 It lives in! Half life, — silence, while you learn
 What has been done; the other half, — attempt
 At speech, amid world's wail of wonderment —
 "Here's something done was never done before!"
 To be the very breath that moves the age
 Means not to have breath drive you bubble-like
 Before it — but yourself to blow: that's strain;

Strain's worry through the life-time, till there's
peace;

We know where peace expects the artist-soul. 1060

Monsieur Léonce Miranda knew as much.
Therefore in Art he nowise cared to be
Creative; but creation, that had birth
In storminess long years before was born
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, — Art, enjoyed
Like fleshly objects of the chase that tempt
In cookery, not in capture — these might feast
The dilettante, furnish tavern-fare
Open to all with purses open too.

To sit free and take tribute *seigneur*-like — 1070

Now, not too lavish of acknowledgment,
Now, self-indulgently profuse of pay,
Always Art's *seigneur*, not Art's serving-man
Whate'er the style and title and degree, —
That is the quiet life and easy death
Monsieur Léonce Miranda would approve
Wholly — provided (back I go again
To the first simile) that while glasses clink,
And viands steam, and banqueting laughs high,
All that's outside the temporary tent, 1080
The dim grim outline of the circuit-wall,
Forgets to menace "Soon or late will drop
Pavilion, soon or late you needs must march,
And laggards will be sorry they were slack!
Always — unless excuse sound plausible!"

Monsieur Léonce Miranda knew as much:
Whence his determination just to paint
So creditably as might help the eye
To comprehend how painter's eye grew dim
Ere it produced L'Ingegno's piece of work — 1090

So to become musician that his ear
 Should judge, by its own tickling and turmoil,
 Who made the Solemn Mass might well die deaf —
 So cultivate a literary knack
 That, by experience how it wiles the time,
 He might imagine how a poet, rapt
 In rhyming wholly, grew so poor at last
 By carelessness about his banker's-book,
 That the *Sieur Boileau* (to provoke our smile)
 Began abruptly, — when he paid *devoir* 1100
 To *Louis Quatorze* as he dined in state, —
 “Sire, send a drop of broth to *Pierre Corneille*
 Now dying and in want of sustenance!”
 — I say, these half-hour playings at life's toil,
 Diversified by billiards, riding, sport —
 With now and then a visitor — *Dumas*,
Hertford — to check no aspiration's flight —
 While *Clara*, like a diamond in the dark,
 Should extract shining from what else were shade,
 And multiply chance rays a million-fold, — 1110
 How could he doubt that all offence outside —
 Wrong to the towers, which, pillowed on the turf,
 He thus shut eyes to, — were as good as gone?

So, down went *Clairvaux-Priory* to dust,
 And up there rose, in lieu, yon structure gay
 Above the Norman ghosts: and where the stretch
 Of barren country girdled house about,
 Behold the Park, the English preference!
 Thus made undoubtedly a desert smile
Monsieur Léonce Miranda.

Ay, but she? 1120

One should not so merge soul in soul, you think?
 And I think: only, let us wait, nor want
 Two things at once — her turn will come in time.

A cork-float danced upon the tide, we saw,
 This morning, blinding-bright with briny dew:
 There was no disengaging soaked from sound,
 Earth-product from the sister-element.
 But when we turn, the tide will turn, I think,
 And bare on beach will lie exposed the buoy:
 A very proper time to try, with foot 1130
 And even finger, which was buoying wave,
 Which merely buoyant substance, — power to lift,
 And power to be sent skyward passively.
 Meanwhile, no separation of the pair!

III

And so slipt pleasantly away five years
 Of Paradisiac dream; till, as there flit
 Premonitory symptoms, pricks of pain,
 Because the dreamer has to start awake
 And find disease dwelt active all the while
 In head or stomach through his night-long sleep, —
 So happened here disturbance to content.

Monsieur Léonce Miranda's last of cares,
 Ere he composed himself, had been to make
 Provision that, while sleeping safe he lay, 10
 Somebody else should, dragon-like, let fall
 Never a lid, coiled round the apple-stem,
 But watch the precious fruitage. Somebody
 Kept shop, in short, played Paris-substitute.
 Himself, shrewd, well-trained, early-exercised,
 Could take in, at an eye-glance, luck or loss —
 Know commerce throve, though lazily uplift
 On elbow merely: leave his bed, forsooth?
 Such active service was the substitute's.

But one October morning, at first drop 20
 Of appled gold, first summons to be grave

Because rough Autumn's play turns earnest now,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda was required
In Paris to take counsel, face to face,
With Madame-mother: and be rated, too,
Roundly at certain items of expense
Whereat the government provisional,
The Paris substitute and shopkeeper,
Shook head, and talked of funds inadequate:
Oh, in the long run, — not if remedy 30
Occurred betimes! Else, — tap the generous bole
Too near the quick, — it withers to the root —
Leafy, prolific, golden apple-tree,
“Miranda,” sturdy in the Place Vendôme!

“What is this reckless life you lead?” began
Her greeting she whom most he feared and loved,
Madame Miranda. “Luxury, extravagance
Sardanapalus' self might emulate, —
Did your good father's money go for this?
Where are the fruits of education, where 40
The morals which at first distinguished you,
The faith which promised to adorn your age?
And why such wastefulness outbreking now,
When heretofore you loved economy?
Explain this pulling-down and building-up
Poor Clairvaux, which your father bought because
Clairvaux he found it, and so left to you,
Not a gilt-gingerbread big baby-house!
True, we could somehow shake head and shut eye
To what was past prevention on our part — 50
This reprehensible illicit bond:
We, in a manner, winking, watched consort
Our modest well-conducted pious son
With Dalilah: we thought the smoking flax
Would smoulder soon away and end in snuff.

Is spark to strengthen, prove consuming fire?
 No lawful family calls Clairvaux 'home' —
 Why play that fool of Scripture whom the voice
 Admonished 'Whose to-night shall be those things
 Provided for thy morning jollity?' 60

To take one specimen of pure caprice
 Out of the heap conspicuous in the plan, —
 Puzzle of change, I call it, — titled big
 'Clairvaux Restored:' what means this Belvedere?
 This Tower, stuck like a fool's-cap on the roof —
 Do you intend to soar to heaven from thence?
 Tower, truly! Better had you planted turf —
 More fitly would you dig yourself a hole
 Beneath it for the final journey's help!

O we poor parents — could we prophesy!" 70

Léonce was found affectionate enough
 To man, to woman, child, bird, beast, alike;
 But all affection, all one fire of heart
 Flaming toward Madame-mother. Had she posed
 The question plainly at the outset "Choose!
 Cut clean in half your all-the-world of love,
 The mother and the mistress: then resolve,
 Take me or take her, throw away the one!" —
 He might have made the choice and marred my tale.
 But, much I apprehend, the problem put 80
 Was "Keep both halves, yet do no detriment
 To either! Prize each opposite in turn!"

Hence, while he prized at worth the Clairvaux-life
 With all its tolerated naughtiness,
 He, visiting in fancy Quai Rousseau,
 Saw, cornered in the cosiest nook of all
 That range of rooms through number Thirty-three,
 The lady-mother bent o'er her *bézique*;
 While Monsieur Curé This, and Sister That —
 Superior of no matter what good House — 90

Did duty for Duke Hertford and Dumas,
 Nay — at his mother's age — for Clara's self.
 At Quai Rousseau, things comfortable thus,
 Why should poor Clairvaux prove so troublesome?
 She played at cards, he built a Belvedere.
 But here's the difference: she had reached the Towers
 And there took pastime: he was still on Turf —
 Though fully minded that, when once he marched,
 No sportive fancy should distract him more.

In brief, the man was angry with himself, 100
 With her, with all the world and much beside:
 And so the unseemly words were interchanged
 Which crystallize what else evaporates,
 And makes mere misty petulance grow hard
 And sharp inside each softness, heart and soul.
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda flung at last
 Out of doors, fever-flushed: and there the Seine
 Rolled at his feet, obsequious remedy
 For fever, in a cold Autumnal flow.
 "Go and be rid of memory in a bath!" 110
 Craftily whispered Who besets the ear
 On such occasions.

Done as soon as dreamed.
 Back shivers poor Léonce to bed — where else?
 And there he lies a month 'twixt life and death,
 Raving. "Remorse of conscience!" friends opine.
 "Sirs, it may partly prove so," represents
 Beaumont — (the family physician, he
 Whom last year's Commune murdered, do you
 mind?)
 Beaumont reports "There is some active cause,
 More than mere pungency of quarrel past, — 120
 Cause that keeps adding other food to fire.

I hear the words and know the signs, I say!
 Dear Madame, you have read the Book of Saints,
 How Antony was tempted? As for me,
 Poor heathen, 't is by pictures I am taught.
 I say then, I see standing here, — between
 Me and my patient, and that crucifix
 You very properly would interpose, —
 A certain woman-shape, one white appeal
 'Will you leave me, then, me, me, me for her?' 130
 Since cold Seine could not quench this flame, since
 flare

Of fever does not redden it away, —
 Be rational, indulgent, mute — should chance
 Come to the rescue — Providence, I mean —
 The while I blister and phlebotomize!"

Well, somehow rescued by whatever power,
 At month's end, back again conveyed himself
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda, worn to rags,
 Nay, tinder: stuff irreparably spoiled, 139
 Though kindly hand should stitch and patch its best.
 Clairvaux in Autumn is restorative.
 A friend stitched on, patched ever. All the same,
 Clairvaux looked grayer than a month ago.
 Unglossed was shrubbery, unglorified
 Each copse, so wealthy once; the garden-plots,
 The orchard-walks showed dearth and dreariness.
 The sea lay out at distance crammed by cloud
 Into a leaden wedge; and sorrowful
 Sulked field and pasture with persistent rain.
 Nobody came so far from Paris now: 150
 Friends did their duty by an invalid
 Whose convalescence claimed entire repose.
 Only a single ministrant was stanch
 At quiet reparation of the stuff —

Monsieur Léonce Miranda, worn to rags:
But she was Clara and the world beside.

Another month, the year packed up his plagues
And sullenly departed, peddler-like,
As apprehensive old-world ware might show
To disadvantage when the new-comer, 160
Merchant of novelties, young 'Sixty-eight,
With brand-new bargains, whistled o'er the lea.
Things brightened somewhat o'er the Christmas
hearth,
As Clara plied assiduously her task.

"Words are but words and wind. Why let the wind
Sing in your ear, bite, sounding, to your brain?
Old folk and young folk, still at odds, of course!
Age quarrels because spring puts forth a leaf
While winter has a mind that boughs stay bare;
Or rather — worse than quarrel — age descries 170
Propriety in preaching life to death.
'Enjoy nor youth, nor Clairvaux, nor poor me?'
Dear Madame, you enjoy your age, 't is thought!
Your number Thirty-three on Quai Rousseau
Cost fifty times the price of Clairvaux, tipped
Even with our prodigious Belvedere;
You entertain the Curé, — we, Dumas:
We play charades, while you prefer *bézique*:
Do lead your own life and let ours alone! 179
Cross Old Year shall have done his worst, my friend!
Here comes gay New Year with a gift, no doubt.
Look up and let in light that longs to shine —
One flash of light, and where will darkness hide?
Your cold makes me too cold, love! Keep me warm!'

Whereat Léonce Miranda raised his head
From his two white thin hands, and forced a smile,

And spoke: "I do look up, and see your light
Above me! Let New Year contribute warmth —
I shall refuse no fuel that may blaze."

Nor did he. Three days after, just a spark 190
From Paris, answered by a snap at Caen
Or whither reached the telegraphic wire:
"Quickly to Paris! On arrival, learn
Why you are wanted!" Curt and critical!

Off starts Léonce, one fear from head to foot;
Caen, Rouen, Paris, as the railway helps;
Then come the Quai and Number Thirty-three.
"What is the matter, concierge?" — a grimace!
He mounts the staircase, makes for the main seat
Of dreadful mystery which draws him there — 200
Bursts in upon a bedroom known too well —
There lies all left now of the mother once.
Tapers define the stretch of rigid white,
Nor want there ghastly velvets of the grave.
A blackness sits on either side at watch,
Sisters, good souls but frightful all the same,
Silent: a priest is spokesman for his corpse.
"Dead, through Léonce Miranda! stricken down
Without a minute's warning, yesterday!
What did she say to you, and you to her, 210
Two months ago? This is the consequence!
The doctors have their name for the disease;
I, you, and God say — heart-break, nothing more!"
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, like a stone
Fell at the bedfoot and found respite so,
While the priest went to tell the company.
What follows you are free to disbelieve.
It may be true or false that this good priest
Had taken his instructions, — who shall blame? —
From quite another quarter than, perchance, 220

Monsieur Léonce Miranda might suppose
Would offer solace in such pressing need.
All he remembered of his kith and kin
Was they were worthily his substitutes
In commerce, did their work and drew their pay.
But *they* remembered, in addition, this —
They fairly might expect inheritance,
As nearest kin, called Family by law
And gospel both. Now, since Miranda's life
Showed nothing like abatement of distaste 230
For conjugality, but preference
Continued and confirmed of that smooth chain
Which slips and leaves no knot behind, no heir —
Presumption was, the man, become mature,
Would at a calculable day discard
His old and outworn . . . what we blush to name,
And make society the just amends;
Scarce by a new attachment — Heaven forbid!
Still less by lawful marriage: that 's reserved
For those who make a proper choice at first — 240
Not try both courses and would grasp in age
The very treasure youth preferred to spurn.
No! putting decently such thought aside,
The penitent must rather give his powers
To such a reparation of the past
As, edifying kindred, makes them rich.
Now, how would it enrich prospectively
The Cousins, if he lavished such expense
On Clairvaux? — pretty as a toy, but then
As toy, so much productive and no more! 250
If all the outcome of the goldsmith's shop
Went to gild Clairvaux, where remains the funds
For Cousinry to spread out lap and take?
This must be thought of and provided for.
I give it you as mere conjecture, mind!

To help explain the wholesome unannounced
 Intelligence, the shock that startled guilt,
 The scenic show, much yellow, black and white
 By taper-shine, the nuns — portentous pair,
 And, more than all, the priest's admonishment — 260
 "No flattery of self! You murdered her!
 The gray lips, silent now, reprove by mine.
 You wasted all your living, rioted
 In harlotry — she warned and I repeat!
 No warning had she, for she needed none:
 If this should be the last yourself receive?"
 Done for the best, no doubt, though clumsily, —
 Such, and so startling, the reception here,
 You hardly wonder if down fell at once
 The tawdry tent, pictorial, musical, 270
 Poetical, besprent with hearts and darts;
 Its cobweb-work, betinselled stitchery,
 Lay dust about our sleeper on the turf,
 And showed the outer towers distinct and dread.

Senseless he fell, and long he lay, and much
 Seemed salutary in his punishment
 To planners and performers of the piece.
 When pain ends, pardon prompt may operate.
 There was a good attendance close at hand,
 Waiting the issue in the great saloon, 280
 Cousins with consolation and advice.

All things thus happily performed to point,
 No wonder at success commensurate.
 Once swooning stopped, once anguish subsequent
 Raved out, — a sudden resolution chilled
 His blood and changed his swimming eyes to stone,
 As the poor fellow raised himself upright,
 Collected strength, looked, once for all, his look,

Then, turning, put officious help aside 289
And passed from out the chamber. "For affairs!"
So he announced himself to the saloon:
"We owe a duty to the living too!" —
Monsieur Léonce Miranda tried to smile.
How did the hearts of Cousinry rejoice
At their stray sheep returning thus to fold,
As, with a dignity, precision, sense,
All unsuspected in the man before,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda made minute
Detail of his intended scheme of life
Thenceforward and forever. "Vanity 300
Was ended: its redemption must begin —
And, certain, would continue; but since life
Was awfully uncertain — witness here! —
Behoved him lose no moment but discharge
Immediate burthen of the world's affairs
On backs that kindly volunteered to crouch.
Cousins, with easier conscience, blamelessly
Might carry on the goldsmith's trade, in brief,
Uninterfered with by its lord who late
Was used to supervise and take due tithe. 310
A stipend now sufficed his natural need:
Themselves should fix what sum allows man live.
But half a dozen words concisely plain
Might, first of all, make sure that, on demise,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's property
Passed by bequeathment, every particle,
To the right heirs, the cousins of his heart.
As for that woman — they would understand!
This was a step must take her by surprise.
It were too cruel did he snatch away 320
Decent subsistence. She was young, and fair,
And . . . and attractive! Means must be supplied
To save her from herself, and from the world,

And . . . from anxieties might haunt him else
When he would fain have other thoughts in mind."

It was a sight to melt a stone, that thaw
Of rigid disapproval into dew
Of sympathy, as each extended palm
Of cousin hasted to enclose those five
Cold fingers, tendered so mistrustfully, 330
Despairingly of condonation now!
You would have thought, — at every fervent shake,
In reassurance of those timid tips, —
The penitent had squeezed, considerate,
By way of fee into physician's hand
For physicking his soul, some diamond knob.

And now let pass a week. Once more behold
The same assemblage in the same saloon,
Waiting the entry of protagonist
Monsieur Léonce Miranda. "Just a week 340
Since the death-day, — was ever man transformed
Like this man?" questioned cousin of his mate.
Last seal to the repentance had been set
Three days before, at Sceaux in neighborhood
Of Paris, where they laid with funeral pomp
Mother by father. Let me spare the rest:
How the poor fellow, in his misery,
Buried hot face and bosom, where heaped snow
Offered assistance, at the grave's black edge,
And there lay, till uprooted by main force 350
From where he prayed to grow and ne'er again
Walk earth unworthily as heretofore.
It is not with impunity priests teach
The doctrine he was dosed with from his youth —
"Pain to the body — profit to the soul;
Corporeal pleasure — so much woe to pay
When disembodied spirit gives account."

However, woe had done its worst, this time.
Three days allow subsidence of much grief.
Already, regular and equable, 360
Forward went purpose to effect. At once
The testament was written, signed and sealed.
Disposure of the commerc — that took time,
And would not suffer by a week's delay;
But the immediate, the imperious need,
The call demanding of the Cousinry
Co-operation, what convened them thus,
Was — how and when should deputation march
To Coliseum Street, the old abode
Of wickedness, and there acquaint — oh, shame! 370
Her, its old inmate, who had followed up
And lay in wait in the old haunt for prey —
That they had rescued, they possessed Léonce,
Whose loathing at recapture equalled theirs —
Upbraid that sinner with her sinfulness,
Impart the fellow-sinner's firm resolve
Never to set eyes on her face again:
Then, after stipulations strict but just,
Hand her the first instalment, — moderate
Enough, no question, — of her salary: 380
Admonish for the future, and so end. —
All which good purposes, decided on
Sufficiently, were waiting full effect
When presently the culprit should appear.

Somehow appearance was delayed too long;
Chatting and chirping sunk unconsciously
To silence, nay, uneasiness, at length
Alarm, till — anything for certitude! —
A peeper was commissioned to explore,
At keyhole, what the laggard's task might be — 390
What caused so palpable a disrespect!

Back came the tiptoe cousin from his quest.
 "Monsieur Léonce was busy," he believed;
 "Contemplating — those love-letters, perhaps,
 He always carried, as if precious stones,
 About with him. He read, one after one,
 Some sort of letters. But his back was turned.
 The empty coffer open at his side,
 He leant on elbow by the mantelpiece
 Before the hearth-fire; big and blazing too." 400

"Better he shovelled them all in at once,
 And burned the rubbish!" was a cousin's quip,
 Warming his own hands at the fire the while.
 I told you, snow had fallen outside, I think.

When suddenly a cry, a host of cries,
 Screams, hubbub and confusion thrilled the room.
 All by a common impulse rushed thence, reached
 The late death-chamber, tricked with trappings still,
 Skull, cross-bones, and such moral broidery.
 Madame Muhlhausen might have played the
 witch, 410

Dropped down the chimney and appalled Léonce
 By some proposal "Parting touch of hand!"
 If she but touched his foolish hand, you know!!

Something had happened quite contrariwise.
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda, one by one,
 Had read the letters and the love they held,
 And, that task finished, had required his soul
 To answer frankly what the prospect seemed
 Of his own love's departure — pledged to part!
 Then, answer being unmistakable, 420
 He had replaced the letters quietly,
 Shut coffer, and so, grasping either side

By its convenient handle, plunged the whole —
 Letters and coffer and both hands to boot,
 Into the burning grate and held them there.
 “Burn, burn and purify my past!” said he,
 Calmly, as if he felt no pain at all.

In vain they pulled him from the torture-place:
 The strong man, with the soul of tenfold strength,
 Broke from their clutch: and there again smiled he,
 The miserable hands re-bathed in fire — 431
 Constant to that ejaculation “Burn,
 Burn, purify!” And when, combining force,
 They fairly dragged the victim out of reach
 Of further harm, he had no hands to hurt —
 Two horrible remains of right and left,
 “Whereof the bones, phalanges formerly,
 Carbonized, were still crackling with the flame,”
 Said Beaumont. And he fought them all the while:
 “Why am I hindered when I would be pure? 440
 Why leave the sacrifice still incomplete?
 She holds me, I must have more hands to burn!”
 They were the stronger, though, and bound him
 fast.

Beaumont was in attendance presently.
 “What did I tell you? Preachment to the deaf!
 I wish he had been deafer when they preached,
 Those priests! But wait till next Republic comes!”

As for Léonce, a single sentiment
 Possessed his soul and occupied his tongue —
 Absolute satisfaction at the deed. 450
 Never he varied, 't is observable,
 Nor in the stage of agonies (which proved
 Absent without leave, — science seemed to think)

Nor yet in those three months' febricity
Which followed, — never did he vary tale —
Remaining happy beyond utterance.

"Ineffable beatitude" — I quote
The words, I cannot give the smile — "such bliss
Abolished pain! Pain might or might not be:
He felt in heaven, where flesh desists to fret. 460
Purified now and henceforth, all the past
Reduced to ashes with the flesh defiled!
Why all those anxious faces round his bed?
What was to pity in their patient, pray,
When doctor came and went, and Cousins watched?
— Kindness, but in pure waste!" he said and smiled.

And if a trouble would at times disturb
The ambrosial mood, it came from other source
Than the corporeal transitory pang.
"If sacrifice be incomplete!" cried he — 470
"If ashes have not sunk reduced to dust,
To nullity! If atoms coalesce

Till something grow, grow, get to be a shape
I hate, I hoped to burn away from me!
She is my body, she and I are one,
Yet, all the same, there, there at bed-foot stands
The woman wound about my flesh and blood,
There, the arms open, the more wonderful,
The whiter for the burning . . . Vanish thou!
Avaunt, fiend's self found in the form I wore!" 480

"Whereat," said Beaumont, "since his hands were
gone,

The patient in a frenzy kicked and licked
To keep off some imagined visitant.
So will it prove as long as priests may preach
Spiritual terrors!" groaned the evidence
Of Beaumont that his patient was stark mad —

Produced in time and place: of which anon.
 “Mad, or why thus insensible to pain?
 Body and soul are one thing, with two names
 For more or less elaborated stuff.”

490

Such is the new *Religio Medici*.
 Though antiquated faith held otherwise,
 Explained that body is not soul, but just
 Soul's servant: that, if soul be satisfied,
 Possess already joy or pain enough,
 It uses to ignore, as master may,
 What increase, joy or pain, its servant brings —
 Superfluous contribution: soul, once saved,
 Has naught to do with body's service more.
 Each, speculated on exclusively, 500
 As if its office were the only one,
 Body or soul, either shows service paid
 In joy and pain, that's blind and objectless —
 A servant's toiling for no master's good —
 Or else shows good received and put to use,
 As if within soul's self grew joy and pain,
 Nor needed body for a ministrant.
 I note these old unscientific ways:
 Poor Beaumont cannot: for the Commune ruled 509
 Next year, and ere they shot his priests, shot him.

Monsieur Léonce Miranda raved himself
 To rest; lay three long months in bliss or bale,
 Inactive, anyhow: more need that heirs,
 His natural protectors, should assume
 The management, bestir their counsinship,
 And carry out that purpose of reform
 Such tragic work now made imperative
 A deputation, with austerity,
 Nay, sternness, bore her sentence to the fiend

Aforesaid,—she at watch for turn of wheel 520
 And fortune's favor, Street — you know the name.
 A certain roughness seemed appropriate: "You —
 Steiner, Muhlhausen, whatsoe'er your name,
 Cause whole and sole of this catastrophe!" —
 And so forth, introduced the embassy.

"Monsieur Léonce Miranda was divorced
 Once and forever from his — ugly word.
 Himself had gone for good to Portugal:
 They came empowered to act and stipulate.
 Hold! no discussion! Terms were settled now: 530
 So much of present and prospective pay,
 But also — good engagement in plain terms
 She never seek renewal of the past!"

This little harmless tale produced effect.
 Madame Muhlhausen owned her sentence just,
 Its execution gentle. "Stern their phrase,
 These kinsfolk with a right she recognized —
 But kind its import probably, which now
 Her agitation, her bewilderment
 Rendered too hard to understand, perhaps. 540
 Let them accord the natural delay,
 And she would ponder and decide. Meantime,
 So far was she from wish to follow friend
 Who fled her, that she would not budge from place—. .
 Now that her friend was fled to Portugal, —
 Never! *She* leave this Coliseum Street?
 No, not a footstep!" she assured them.

So —

They saw they might have left that tale untold
 When, after some weeks more were gone to waste,
 Recovery seemed incontestable, 550
 And the poor mutilated figure, once

The gay and glancing fortunate young spark,
 Miranda, humble and obedient took
 The doctor's counsel, issued sad and slow
 From precincts of the sick-room, tottered down,
 And out, and into carriage for fresh air,
 And so drove straight to Coliseum Street,
 And tottered upstairs, knocked, and in a trice
 Was clasped in the embrace of whom you know —
 With much asseveration, I omit, 560
 Of constancy henceforth till life should end.
 When all this happened, — "What reward," cried she,
 "For judging her Miranda by herself!
 For never having entertained a thought
 Of breaking promise, leaving home forsooth,
 To follow who was fled to Portugal!
 As if she thought they spoke a word of truth!
 She knew what love was, knew that he loved her;
 The Cousinry knew nothing of the kind."

I will not scandalize you and recount 570
 How matters made the morning pass away.
 Not one reproach, not one acknowledgment,
 One explanation: all was understood!
 Matters at end, the home-uneasiness
 Cousins were feeling at this jaunt prolonged
 Was ended also by the entry of —
 Not simply him whose exit had been made
 By mild command of doctor "Out with you!
 I warrant we receive another man!"
 But — would that I could say, the married pair! 580
 And, quite another man assuredly,
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda took on him
 Forthwith to bid the trio, priest and nuns,
 Constant in their attendance all this while,
 Take his thanks and their own departure too;

Politely but emphatically. Next,
 The Cousins were dismissed: "No protest, pray!
 Whatever I engaged to do is done,
 Or shall be — I but follow your advice:
 Love I abjure: the lady, you behold, 590
 Is changed as I myself; her sex is changed:
 This is my Brother — He will tend me now,
 Be all my world henceforth as brother should.
 Gentleman, of a kinship I revere,
 Your interest in trade is laudable;
 I purpose to indulge it: manage mine,
 My goldsmith-business in the Place Vendôme.
 Wholly — through purchase at the price adjudged
 By experts I shall have assistance from.
 If, in conformity with sage advice, 600
 I leave a busy world of interests
 I own myself unfit for — yours the care
 That any world of other aims, wherein
 I hope to dwell, be easy of access
 Through ministration of the moneys due,
 As we determine, with all proper speed,
 Since I leave Paris to repair my health.
 Say farewell to our Cousins, Brother mine!"

And, all submissiveness, as brother might,
 The lady curtseyed gracefully, and dropt 610
 More than mere curtsey, a concluding phrase
 So silver-soft, yet penetrative too,
 That none of it escaped the favored ears:
 "Had I but credited one syllable,
 I should to-day be lying stretched on straw,
 The produce of your miserable *rente*!
 Whereas, I hold him — do you comprehend?"
 Cousin regarded cousin, turned up eye,
 And took departure, as our Tuscans laugh, 619

Each with his added palm-breadth of long nose, —
Curtailed but imperceptibly, next week,
When transfer was accomplished, and the trade
In Paris did indeed become their own,
But bought by them and sold by him on terms
'Twixt man and man, — might serve 'twixt wolf
and wolf,
Substitute "bit and clawed" for "signed and
sealed" —

Our ordinary business-terms, in short.
Another week, and Clairvaux broke in bloom
At end of April, to receive again
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, gentleman, 630
Ex-jeweller and goldsmith: never more, —
According to the purpose he professed, —
To quit this paradise, his property,
This Clara, his companion: so it proved.

The Cousins, each with elongated nose,
Discussed their bargain, reconciled them soon
To hard necessity, disbursed the cash,
And hastened to subjoin, wherever type
Proclaimed "Miranda" to the public, "Called
Now Firm-Miranda." There, a colony, 640
They flourish underneath the name that still
Maintains the old repute, I understand.
They built their Clairvaux, dream-Château, in Spain,
Perhaps — but Place Vendôme is waking worth:
Oh, they lost little! — only, man and man
Hardly conclude transactions of the kind
As cousin should with cousin, — cousins think.
For the rest, all was honorably done,
So, ere buds break to blossom, let us breathe!
Never suppose there was one particle 650
Of recrudescence — wound, half-healed before,

Set freshly running — sin, repressed as such,
 New loosened as necessity of life!
 In all this revocation and resolve,
 Far be sin's self-indulgence from your thought!
 The man had simply made discovery,
 By process I respect if not admire,
 That what was, was:—that turf, his feet had touched,
 Felt solid just as much as yonder towers
 He saw with eyes, but did not stand upon, 660
 And could not, if he would, reach in a leap.
 People had told him flowery turf was false
 To footstep, tired the traveller soon, beside:
 That was untrue. They told him "One fair stride
 Plants on safe platform and secures man rest."
 That was untrue. Some varied the advice:
 "Neither was solid, towers no more than turf."
 Double assertion, therefore twice as false.
 "I like these amateurs" — our friend had laughed,
 Could he turn what he felt to what he thought, 670
 And, that again, to what he put in words:
 "I like their pretty trial, proof of paste
 Or precious stone, by delicate approach
 Of eye askance, fine feel of finger-tip,
 Or touch of tongue inquisitive for cold.
 I tried my jewels in a erueible:
 Fierce fire has felt them, licked them, left them sound.
 Don't tell me that my earthly love is sham,
 My heavenly fear a clever counterfeit!
 Each may oppose each, yet be true alike!" 680

To build up, independent of the towers,
 A durable pavilion o'er the turf,
 Had issued in disaster. "What remained
 Except, by tunnel, or else gallery,
 To keep communication 'twixt the two,

Unite the opposites, both near and far,
And never try complete abandonment
Of one or other?" so he thought, not said.
And to such engineering feat, I say,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda saw the means 690
Precisely in this revocation prompt
Of just those benefits of worldly wealth
Conferred upon his Cousinry — all but!

This Clairvaux — you would know, were you at top
Of yonder crowning grace, its Belvedere —
Is situate in one angle-niche of three
At equidistance from Saint-Rambert — there
Behind you, and The Ravissante, beside —
There: steeple, steeple, and this Clairvaux-top,
(A sort of steeple) constitute a trine, 700
With not a tenement to break each side,
Two miles or so in length, if eye can judge.
Now, this is native land of miracle.
O why, why, why, from all recorded time,
Was miracle not wrought once, only once,
To help whoever wanted help indeed?
If on the day when Spring's green girlishness
Grew nubile and she trembled into May,
And our Miranda climbed to clasp the Spring
A-tiptoe o'er the sea, those wafts of warmth, 710
Those cloudlets scudding under the bare blue,
And all that new sun, that fresh hope about
His airy place of observation, — friend,
Feel with me that if just then, just for once,
Some angel, — such as the authentic pen
Yonder records a daily visitant
Of ploughman Claude, rheumatic in the joints,
And spinster Jeanne, with megrim troubled sore, —
If such an angel, with naught else to do,

Had taken station on the pinnacle 720
 And simply said "Léonce, look straight before!
 Neither to right hand nor to left: for why?
 Being a stupid soul, you want a guide
 To turn the goodness in you to account
 And make stupidity submit itself.

Go to Saint-Rambert! Straightway get such guide!
 There stands a man of men. You, jeweller,
 Must needs have heard how once the biggest block
 Of diamond now in Europe lay exposed
 Mid specimens of stone and earth and ore, 730
 On huckster's stall, — Navona names the Square,
 And Rome the city for the incident, —
 Labelled 'quartz-crystal, price one halfpenny.'
 Haste and secure that ha'p' worth, on your life!
 That man will read you rightly head to foot,
 Mark the brown face of you, the bushy beard,
 The breadth 'twixt shoulderblades, and through
 each black

Castilian orbit, see into your soul.
 Talk to him for five minutes — nonsense, sense,
 No matter what — describe your horse, your
 hound, — 740

Give your opinion of the policy
 Of Monsieur Rouher, — will he succor Rome?
 Your estimate of what may outcome be
 From Œcumenical Assemblage there!
 After which samples of intelligence,
 Rapidly run through those events you call
 Your past life, tell what once you tried to do,
 What you intend on doing this next May!
 There he stands, reads an English newspaper,
 Stock-still, and now, again upon the move, 750
 Paces the beach to taste the Spring, like you,
 Since both are human beings in God's eye.

He will have understood you, I engage.
Endeavor, for your part, to understand
He knows more, and loves better, than the world
That never heard his name, and never may.
He will have recognized, ere breath be spent
And speech at end, how much that 's good in
man,

And generous, and self-devoting, makes
Monsieur Léonce Miranda worth his help; 760
While sounding to the bottom ignorance
Historical and philosophical
And moral and religious, all once couch
Of crassitude, a portent of its kind.
Then, just as he would pityingly teach
Your body to repair maltreatment, give
Advice that you should make those stumps to
stir

With artificial hands of caoutchouc,
So would he soon supply your crippled soul
With crutches, from his own intelligence, 770
Able to help you onward in the path
Of rectitude whereto your face is set,
And counsel justice — to yourself, the first,
To your associate, very like a wife
Or something better, — to the world at large,
Friends, strangers, horses, hounds and Cousinry —
All which amount of justice will include
Justice to God. Go and consult his voice!"
Since angel would not say this simple truth,
What hinders that my heart relieve itself, 780
Milsand, who makest warm my wintry world,
And wise my heaven, if there we consort too?
Monsieur Léonce Miranda turned, alas,
Or was turned, by no angel, t'other way,
And got him guidance of The Ravissante.

Now, into the originals of faith,
 Yours, mine, Miranda's, no inquiry here!
 Of faith, as apprehended by mankind,
 The causes, were they caught and catalogued,
 Would too distract, too desperately foil 790
 Inquirer. How may analyst reduce
 Quantities to exact their opposites,
 Value to zero, then bring zero back
 To value of supreme preponderance?
 How substitute thing meant for thing expressed?
 Detect the wire-thread through that fluffy silk
 Men call their rope, their real compulsive power?
 Suppose effected such anatomy,
 And demonstration made of what belief
 Has moved believer — were the consequence 800
 Reward at all? would each man straight deduce,
 From proved reality of cause, effect
 Conformable — believe and unbelieve
 According to your True thus disengaged
 From all his heap of False called reason first?

No: hand once used to hold a soft thick twist,
 Cannot now grope its way by wire alone:
 Childhood may catch the knack, scarce Youth, not
 Age!

That's the reply rewards you. Just as well
 Remonstrate to yon peasant in the blouse 810
 That, had he justified the true intent
 Of Nature who composed him thus and thus,
 Weakly or strongly, here he would not stand
 Struggling with uncongenial earth and sky,
 But elsewhere tread the surface of the globe,
 Since one meridian suits the faulty lungs,
 Another bids the sluggish liver work.
 "Here I was born, for better or for worse:

I did not choose a climate for myself;
Admit, my life were healthy, led elsewhere," 820
(He answers) "how am I to migrate, pray?"

Therefore the course to take is — spare your pains,
And trouble uselessly with discontent
Nor soul nor body, by parading proof
That neither haply had known ailment, placed
Precisely where the circumstance forbade
Their lot should fall to either of the pair.
But try and, what you find wrong, remedy,
Accepting the conditions: never ask 829
"How came you to be born here with those lungs,
That liver? But bid asthma smoke a pipe,
Stramonium, just as if no Tropics were,
And ply with calomel the sluggish duct,
Nor taunt "The born Norwegian breeds no bile!"
And as with body, so proceed with soul:
Nor less discerningly, where faith you found,
However foolish and fantastic, grudge
To play the doctor and amend mistake,
Because a wisdom were conceivable
Whence faith had sprung robust above disease. 840
Far beyond human help, that source of things!
Since, in the first stage, so to speak, — first stare
Of apprehension at the invisible, —
Begins divergency of mind from mind,
Superior from inferior: leave this first!
Little you change there! What comes afterward —
From apprehended thing, each inference
With practicality concerning life,
This you may test and try, confirm the right
Or contravene the wrong which reasons there. 850
The offspring of the sickly faith must prove
Sickly act also: stop a monster-birth!

92. RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY

When water's in the cup and not the cloud,
 Then is the proper time for chemic test:
 Belief permits your skill to operate
 When, drop by drop condensed from misty heaven,
 'Tis wrung out, lies a bowlful in the fleece.
 How dew by spoonfuls came, let Gideon say:
 What purpose water serves, your word or two
 May teach him, should he fancy it lights fire. 860

Concerning, then, our vaporous Ravissante —
 How fable first precipitated faith —
 Silence you get upon such point from me.
 But when I see come posting to the pair
 At Clairvaux, for the cure of soul-disease,
 This Father of the Mission, Parish-priest,
 This Mother of the Convent, Nun I know —
 They practise in that second stage of things;
 They boast no fresh distillery of faith;
 'Tis dogma in the bottle, bright and old, 870
 They bring; and I pretend to pharmacy.
 They undertake the cure with all my heart!
 He trusts them, and they surely trust themselves.
 I ask no better. Never mind the cause,
Fons et origo of the malady:
 Apply the drug with courage! Here's our case.
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda asks of God,
 — May a man, living in illicit tie,
 Continue, by connivance of the Church,
 No matter what amends he please to make 880
 Short of forthwith relinquishing the sin?
 Physicians, what do you propose for cure?

Father and Mother of the Ravissante,
 Read your own records, and you find prescribed
 As follows, when a couple out of sorts

Rather than gravely suffering, sought your skill
And thereby got their health again. Perpend!
Two and a half good centuries ago,
Luc de la Maison Rouge, a nobleman
Of Claise, (the river gives this country name) 890
And, just as noblewoman, Maude his wife,
Having been married many happy years
Spent in God's honor and man's service too,
Conceived, while yet in flower of youth and hope,
The project of departing each from each
Forever, and dissolving marriage-bonds
That both might enter a religious life.
Needing, before they came to such resolve,
Divine illumination, — course was clear, —
They visited your church in pilgrimage, 900
On Christmas morn: communicating straight,
They heard three Masses proper for the day,
"It is incredible with what effect" —
Quoth the Cistercian monk I copy from —
And, next day, came, again communicants,
Again heard Masses manifold, but now
With added thanks to Christ for special grace
And consolation granted: in the night,
Had been divorce from marriage, manifest
By signs and tokens. So, they made great gifts, 910
Left money for more Masses, and returned
Homeward rejoicing — he, to take the rules,
As Brother Dionysius, Capucin;
She, to become first postulant, then nun
According to the rules of Benedict,
Sister Scolastica: so ended they,
And so do I — not end nor yet commence
One note or comment. What was done was done.
Now, Father of the Mission, here's your case!
And, Mother of the Convent, here's its cure! 920

If separation was permissible,
 And that decree of Christ "What God hath joined
 Let no man put asunder" nullified
 Because a couple, blameless in the world,
 Had the conceit that, still more blamelessly,
 Out of the world, by breach of marriage-vow,
 Their life was like to pass, — you oracles
 Of God, — since holy Paul says such you are, —
 Hesitate, not one moment, to pronounce
 When questioned by the pair now needing help 930
 "Each from the other go, you guilty ones,
 Preliminary to your least approach
 Nearer the Power that thus could strain a point
 In favor of a pair of innocents
 Who thought their wedded hands not clean enough
 To touch and leave unsullied their souls' snow!
 Are not your hands found filthy by the world,
 Mere human law and custom? Not a step
 Nearer till hands be washed and purified!"

What they did say is immaterial, since 940
 Certainly it was nothing of the kind.
 There was no washing hands of him (alack,
 You take me? — in the figurative sense!),
 But, somehow, gloves were drawn o'er dirt and all,
 And practice with the Church procured thereby.
 Seeing that, — all remonstrance proved in vain,
 Persuasives tried and terrors put to use,
 I nowise question, — still the guilty pair
 Only embraced the closelier, obstinate, —
 Father and Mother went from Clairvaux back 950
 Their weary way, with heaviness of heart,
 I grant you, but each palm well crossed with coin,
 And nothing like a smutch perceptible.
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda might compound

For sin? — no, surely! but by gifts — prepare
His soul the better for contrition, say!
Gift followed upon gift, at all events.
Good counsel was rejected, on one part:
Hard money, on the other — may we hope
Was unreflectingly consigned to purse?

960

Two years did this experiment engage
Monsieur Léonce Miranda: how, by gifts
To God and to God's poor, a man might stay
In sin and yet stave off sin's punishment.
No salve could be conceived more nicely mixed
For this man's nature: generosity, —
Susceptibility to human ills,
Corporeal, mental, — self-devotedness
Made up Miranda — whether strong or weak
Elsewhere, may be inquired another time.
In mercy he was strong, at all events.
Enough! he could not see a beast in pain,
Much less a man, without the will to aid;
And where the will was, oft the means were too,
Since that good bargain with the Cousinry.

970

The news flew fast about the countryside
That, with the kind man, it was ask and have;
And ask and have they did. To instance you: —
A mob of beggars at The Ravissante
Clung to his skirts one day, and cried "We thirst!"
Forthwith he bade a cask of wine be broached
To satisfy all comers, till, dead-drunk
So satisfied, they strewed the holy place.
For this was grown religious and a rite:
Such slips of judgment, gifts irregular,
Showed but as spillings of the golden grist
On either side the hopper, through blind zeal;

979

Steadily the main stream went pouring on
 From mill to mouth of sack — held wide and close
 By Father of the Mission, Parish-priest, 990
 And Mother of the Convent, Nun I know,
 With such effect that, in the sequel, proof
 Was tendered to the Court at Vire, last month,
 That in these same two years, expenditure
 At quiet Clairvaux rose to the amount
 Of Forty Thousand English Pounds: whereof
 A trifle went, no inappropriate close
 Of bounty, to supply the Virgin's crown
 With that stupendous jewel from New-York,
 Now blazing as befits the Star of Sea. 1000

Such signs of grace, outward and visible,
 I rather give you, for your sake and mine,
 Than put in evidence the inward strife,
 Spiritual effort to compound for fault
 By payment of devotion — thank the phrase!
 That payment was as punctual, do not doubt,
 As its far easier fellow. Yesterday
 I trudged the distance from The Ravissante
 To Clairvaux, with my two feet: but our friend,
 The more to edify the country-folk, 1010
 Was wont to make that journey on both knees.
 “Maliciously perverted incident!”
 Snarled the retort, when this was told at Vire:
 “The man paid mere devotion as he passed,
 Knelt decently at just each wayside shrine!”
 Alas, my lawyer, I trudged yesterday —
 On my two feet, and with both eyes wide ope, —
 The distance, and could find no shrine at all!
 According to his lights, I praise the man.
 Enough! incessant was devotion, say — 1020
 With her, you know of, praying at his side.

Still, there be relaxations of the tense;
Or life indemnifies itself for strain,
Or finds its very strain grow feebleness.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's days were passed
Much as of old, in simple work and play.
His first endeavor, on recovery
From that sad ineffectual sacrifice,
Had been to set about repairing loss:
Never admitting, loss was to repair. 1030
No word at any time escaped his lips
— Betrayed a lurking presence, in his heart,
Of sorrow; no regret for mischief done —
Punishment suffered, he would rather say.
Good-tempered schoolboy-fashion, he preferred
To laugh away his flogging, fair price paid
For pleasure out of bounds: if needs must be,
Get pleasure and get flogged a second time!
A sullen subject would have nursed the scars
And made excuse, for throwing grammar by, 1040
That bench was grown uneasy to the seat.
No: this poor fellow cheerfully got hands
Fit for his stumps, and what hands failed to do,
The other members did in their degree —
Unwonted service. With his mouth alone
He wrote, nay, painted pictures — think of that!
He played on a piano pedal-keyed,
Kicked out — if it was Bach's — good music thence.
He rode, that's readily conceivable,
But then he shot and never missed his bird, 1050
With other feats as dexterous: I infer
He was not ignorant what hands are worth,
When he resolved on ruining his own.

So the two years passed somehow — who shall say
Foolishly, — as one estimates mankind,

The work they do, the play they leave undone? —
 Two whole years spent in that experiment
 I told you of, at Clairvaux all the time,
 From April on to April: why that month
 More than another, notable in life? 1060

Does the awakening of the year arouse
 Man to new projects, nerve him for fresh feats
 Of what proves, for the most part of mankind
 Playing or working, novel folly too?
 At any rate, I see no slightest sign
 Of folly (let me tell you in advance),
 Nothing but wisdom meets me manifest
 In the procedure of the Twentieth Day
 Of April, 'Seventy, — folly's year in France.

It was delightful Spring, and out of doors 1070
 Temptation to adventure. Walk or ride?
 There was a wild young horse to exercise,
 And teach the way to go and pace to keep:
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda chose to ride.
 So, while they clapped soft saddle straight on back,
 And bitted jaw to satisfaction, — since
 The partner of his days must stay at home,
 Teased by some trifling legacy of March
 To throat or shoulder, — visit duly paid
 And "farewell" given and received again, — 1080
 As chamber-door considerably closed
 Behind him, still five minutes were to spend.
 How better, than by clearing, two and two,
 The staircase-steps and coming out aloft
 Upon the platform yonder (raise your eyes!)
 And tasting, just as those two years before,
 Spring's bright advance upon the tower a-top,
 The feature of the front, the Belvedere?

Look at it for a moment while I breathe.

IV

Ready to hear the rest? How good you are!

Now for this Twentieth splendid day of Spring,
 All in a tale, — sun, wind, sky, earth and sea, —
 To bid man “Up, be doing!” Mount the stair,
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda mounts so brisk,
 And look — ere his elastic foot arrive —
 Your longest, far and wide, o’er fronting space.
 Yon white streak — Havre lighthouse! Name and
 name,

How the mind runs from each to each relay,
 Town after town, till Paris’ self be touched, 10
 Superlatively big with life and death
 To all the world, that very day perhaps!
 He who stepped out upon the platform here,
 Pinnacled over the expanse, gave thought
 Neither to Rouher nor Ollivier, Roon
 Nor Bismarck, Emperor nor King, but just
 To steeple, church, and shrine, The Ravissante!

He saw Her, whom myself saw, but when Spring
 Was passing into Fall: not robed and crowned
 As, thanks to him, and her you know about, 20
 She stands at present; but She smiled the same.
 Thither he turned — to never turn away.

He thought . . .

(Suppose I should prefer “He said?”
 Along with every act — and speech is act —
 There go, a multitude impalpable
 To ordinary human faculty,
 The thoughts which give the act significance.
 Who is a poet needs must apprehend

Alike both speech and thoughts which prompt to
speak.

Part these, and thought withdraws to poetry: 30
Speech is reported in the newspaper.)

He said, then, probably no word at all,
But thought as follows — in a minute's space —
One particle of ore beats out such leaf!

“This Spring-morn I am forty-three years old:
In prime of life, perfection of estate
Bodily, mental, nay, material too, —
My whole of worldly fortunes reach their height.
Body and soul alike on eminence:
It is not probable I ever raise 40
Soul above standard by increase of worth,
Nor reasonably may expect to lift
Body beyond the present altitude.

“Behold me, Lady called The Ravissante!
Such as I am, I — gave myself to you
So long since, that I cannot say ‘I give.’
All my belongings, what is summed in life,
I have submitted wholly — as man might,
At least, as *I* might, who am weak, not strong, —
Wholly, then, to your rule and governance, 50
So far as I have strength. My weakness was —
I felt a fascination, at each point
And pore of me, a Power as absolute
Claiming that soul should recognize her sway.
O you were no whit clearer Queen, I see,
Throughout the life that rolls out ribbon-like
Its shot-silk length behind me, than the strange
Mystery — how shall I denominate
The unrobed One? Robed you go and crowned as
well,

Named by the nations: she is hard to name, 60
Though you have spelt out certain characters
Obscure upon what fillet binds her brow,
Lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, life's pride.
'So call her, and condemn the enchantress!' —
'Crush

The despot, and recover liberty!' —
Cried despot and enchantress at each ear.
You were conspicuous and pre-eminent,
Authoritative and imperial, — you
Spoke first, claimed homage: did I hesitate?
Born for no mastery, but servitude, 70
Man cannot serve two masters, says the Book;
Master should measure strength with master, then,
Before on servant is imposed a task.
You spoke first, promised best, and threatened most;
The other never threatened, promised, spoke
A single word, but, when your part was done,
Lifted a finger, and I, prostrate, knew
Films were about me, though you stood aloof
Smiling or frowning 'Where is power like mine
To punish or reward thee? Rise, thou fool! 80
Will to be free, and, lo, I lift thee loose!
Did I not will, and could I rise a whit?
Lay I, at any time, content to lie?
'To lie, at all events, brings pleasure: make
Amends by undemanded pain!' I said.
Did not you prompt me? 'Purchase now by pain
Pleasure hereafter in the world to come!
I could not pluck my heart out, as you bade
Unbidden, I burned off my hands at least.
My soul retained its treasure; but my purse 90
Lightened itself with much alacrity.
Well, where is the reward? what promised fruit
Of sacrifice in peace, content? what sense

Of added strength to bear or to forbear?
 What influx of new light assists me now
 Even to guess you recognize a gain
 In what was loss enough to mortal me?
 But she, the less authoritative voice,
 Oh, how distinct enunciating, how
 Plain dealing! Gain she gave was gain indeed! 100
 That, you deny: that, you contemptuous eall
 Aeorns, swine's food not man's meat! 'Spurn the
 draff!'

Ay, but those life-tree apples I prefer,
 Am I to die of hunger till they drop?
 Husks keep flesh from starvation, anyhow.
 Give those life-apples! — one, worth woods of oak,
 Worth aeorns by the wagon-load, — one shoot
 Through heart and brain, assurance bright and
 brief

That you, my Lady, my own Ravissante,
 Feel, through my famine, served and satisfied, 110
 Own me, your starveling, soldier of a sort!
 Your soldier! do I read my title clear
 Even to eall myself your friend, not foe?
 What is the paet between us but a truee?
 At best I shall have starved off enmity,
 Obtained a respite, ransomed me from wrath.
 I pay, instalment by instalment, life,
 Earth's tribute-money, pleasures great and small,
 Whereof should at the last one penny pieee
 Fall short, the whole heap becomes forfeiture. 120
 You find in me deficient soldiership:
 Want the whole life or none. I grudge that whole,
 Because I am not sure of recompense:
 Beeause I want faith. Whose the fault? I ask.
 If insufficient faith have done thus much,
 Contributed thus much of sacrifice,

More would move mountains, you are warrant.

Well,

Grant, you, the grace, I give the gratitude!
And what were easier? 'Ask and have' folk call
Miranda's method: 'Have, nor need to ask!' 130

So do they formulate your quality

Superlative beyond my human grace.

The Ravissante, you ravish men away

From puny aches and petty pains, assuaged

By man's own art with small expenditure

Of pill or potion, unless, put to shame,

Nature is roused and sets things right herself.

Your miracles are grown our commonplace;

No day but pilgrim hobbles his last mile,

Kneels down and rises up, flings crutch away, 140

Or else appends it to the reverend heap

Beneath you, votive cripple-carpentry.

Some few meet failure — oh, they wanted faith,

And may betake themselves to La Salette,

Or seek Lourdes, so that hence the scandal limp!

The many get their grace and go their way

Rejoicing, with a tale to tell, — most like,

A staff to borrow, since the crutch is gone,

Should the first telling happen at my house,

And teller wet his whistle with my wine. 150

I tell this to a doctor and he laughs:

'Give me permission to cry — Out of bed,

You loth rheumatic sluggard! Cheat yon chair

Of laziness, its gouty occupant! —

You should see miracles performed. But now,

I give advice, and take as fee ten francs,

And do as much as does your Ravissante.

Send her that case of cancer to be cured

I have refused to treat for any fee, 159

Bring back my would-be patient sound and whole,

And see me laugh on t'other side my mouth!'
 Can he be right, and are you hampered thus?
 Such pettiness restricts a miracle
 Wrought by the Great Physician, who hears prayer,
 Visibly seated in your mother-lap!
 He, out of nothing, made sky, earth, and sea,
 And all that in them is — man, beast, bird, fish,
 Down to this insect on my parapet.
 Look how the marvel of a minim crawls!
 Were I to kneel among the halt and maimed, 170
 And pray 'Who mad'st the insect with ten legs,
 Make me one finger grow where ten were once!'
 The very priests would thrust me out of church.
 'What folly does the madman dare expect?
 No faith obtains — in this late age, at least —
 Such cure as that! We ease rheumatics, though!'

"Ay, bring the early ages back again,
 What prodigy were unattainable?
 I read your annals. Here came Louis Onze,
 Gave thrice the sum he ever gave before 180
 At one time, some three hundred crowns, to wit —
 On pilgrimage to pray for — health, he found?
 Did he? I do not read it in Commynes.
 Here sent poor joyous Marie-Antoinette
 To thank you that a Dauphin dignified
 Her motherhood — called Duke of Normandy
 And Martyr of the Temple, much the same
 As if no robe of hers had dressed you rich;
 No silver lamps, she gave, illume your shrine!
 Here, following example, fifty years 190
 Ago, in gratitude for birth again
 Of yet another destined King of France,
 Did not the Duchess fashion with her hands,
 And frame in gold and crystal, and present

A bouquet made of artificial flowers?
 And was he King of France, and is not he
 Still Count of Chambord?

“Such the days of faith,
 And such their produce to encourage mine!
 What now, if I too count without my host?
 I too have given money, ornament, 200
 And ‘artificial flowers’ — which, when I plucked,
 Seemed rooting at my heart and real enough:
 What if I gain thereby nor health of mind,
 Nor youth renewed which perished in its prime,
 Burnt to a cinder ’twixt the red-hot bars,
 Nor gain to see my second baby-hope
 Of managing to live on terms with both
 Opposing potentates, the Power and you,
 Crowned with success? I dawdle out my days
 In exile here at Clairvaux, with mock love, 210
 That gives — while whispering ‘Would I dared
 refuse!’ —

What the loud voice declares my heart’s free gift:
 Mock worship, mock superiority
 O’er those I style the world’s benighted ones,
 That irreligious sort I pity so,
 Dumas and even Hertford who is Duke.

“Impiety? Not if I know myself!
 Not if you know the heart and soul I bare,
 I bid you cut, hack, slash, anatomize,
 Till peccant part be found and flung away! 220
 Demonstrate where I need more faith! Describe
 What act shall evidence sufficiency
 Of faith, your warrant for such exercise
 Of power, in my behalf, as all the world
 Except poor praying me declares profuse?

Poor me? Is it that world, not me alone,
 That world which prates of fixed laws and the like,
 I fain would save, poor world so ignorant!
 And your part were — what easy miracle?
 Oh, Lady, could I make your want like mine!" 230

Then his face grew one luminosity.

"Simple, sufficient! Happiness at height!
 I solve the riddle, I persuade mankind.
 I have been just the simpleton who stands —
 Summoned to claim his patrimonial rights —
 At shilly-shally, may he knock or no
 At his own door in his own house and home
 Whereof he holds the very title-deeds!
 Here is my title to this property,
 This power you hold for profit of myself 240
 And all the world at need — which need is now!

"My title — let me hear who controverts!
 Count Mailleville built yon church. Why did he so?
 Because he found your image. How came that?
 His shepherd told him that a certain sheep
 Was wont to scratch with hoof and scrape with horn
 At ground where once the Danes had razed a church.
 Thither he went, and there he dug, and thence
 He disinterred the image he conveyed
 In pomp to Londres yonder, his domain. 250
 You like the old place better than the new.
 The Count might surely have divined as much:
 He did not; some one might have spoke a word:
 No one did. A mere dream had warned enough
 That back again in pomp you best were borne:
 No dream warned, and no need of convoy was;
 An angel caught you up and clapped you down —

No mighty task, you stand one *mètre* high,
And people carry you about at times.
Why, then, did you despise the simple course? 260
Because you are the Queen of Angels: when
You front us in a picture, there flock they,
Angels around you, here and everywhere.

“Therefore, to prove indubitable faith,
Those angels that acknowledge you their queen,
I summon them to bear me to your feet
From Clairvaux through the air, an easy trip!
Faith without flaw! I trust your potency,
Benevolence, your will to save the world —
By such a simplest of procedures, too! 270
Not even by affording angel-help,
Unless it please you: there’s a simpler mode:
Only suspend the law of gravity,
And, while at back, permitted to propel,
The air helps onward, let the air in front
Cease to oppose my passage through the midst!

“Thus I bestride the railing, leg o’er leg,
Thus, lo, I stand, a single inch away,
At dizzy edge of death, — no touch of fear,
As safe on tower above as turf below! 280
Your smile enswathes me in beatitude,
You lift along the votary — who vaults,
Who, in the twinkling of an eye, revives,
Dropt safely in the space before the church —
How crowded, since this morn is market-day!
I shall not need to speak. The news will run
Like wild-fire. ‘Thousands saw Miranda’s flight!’
’Tis telegraphed to Paris in a trice.
The Boulevard is one buzz ‘Do you believe?
Well, this time, thousands saw Miranda’s flight: 290

You know him, goldsmith in the Place Vendôme.
 In goes the Empress to the Emperor:
 'Now — will you hesitate to make disgorge
 Your wicked King of Italy his gains,
 Give the Legations to the Pope once more?'
 Which done, — why, grace goes back to operate,
 They themselves set a good example first,
 Resign the empire twenty years usurped,
 And Henry, the Desired One, reigns o'er France!
 Regenerated France makes all things new! 300
 My house no longer stands on Quai Rousseau
 By Quai rechristened Alacoque: a quai
 Where Renan burns his book, and Veuillot burns
 Renan beside, since Veuillot rules the roast,
 Re-edits now indeed 'The Universe.'
 O blessing, O superlatively big
 With blessedness beyond all blessing dreamed
 By man! for just that promise has effect,
 'Old things shall pass away and all be new!'
 Then, for a culminating mercy-feat, 310
 Wherefore should I dare dream impossible
 That I too have my portion in the change?
 My past with all its sorrow, sin and shame,
 Becomes a blank, a nothing! There she stands,
 Clara de Millefleurs, all deodorized,
 Twenty years' stain wiped off her innocence!
 There never was Muhlhausen, nor at all
 Duke Hertford: naught that was, remains, except
 The beauty, — yes, the beauty is unchanged!
 Well, and the soul too, that must keep the same! 320
 And so the trembling little virgin hand
 Melts into mine, that 's back again, of course!
 — Think not I care about my poor old self!
 I only want my hand for that one use,
 To take her hand, and say 'I marry you —

Men, women, angels, you behold my wife!
 There is no secret, nothing wicked here,
 Nothing she does not wish the world to know!
 None of your married women have the right
 To mutter 'Yes, indeed, she beats us all' 330
 In beauty, — but our lives are pure at least!
 Bear witness, for our marriage is no thing
 Done in a corner! 'Tis the Ravissante
 Repairs the wrong of Paris. See, She smiles,
 She beckons, She bids 'Hither, both of you!
 And may we kneel? And will you bless us both?
 And may I worship you, and yet love her?
 Then!" —

A sublime spring from the balustrade
 About the tower so often talked about,
 A flash in middle air, and stone-dead lay 340
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda on the turf.

A gardener who watched, at work the while
 Dibbling a flower-bed for geranium-shoots,
 Saw the catastrophe, and, straightening back,
 Stood up and shook his brows. "Poor soul, poor
 soul!

Just what I prophesied the end would be!
 Ugh — the Red Night-cap!" (as he raised the head)
 "This must be what he meant by those strange words
 While I was weeding larkspurs yesterday, 349
 'Angels would take him!' Mad!"

No! sane, I say.

Such being the conditions of his life,
 Such end of life was not irrational.
 Hold a belief, you only half-believe,
 With all-momentous issues either way, —
 And I advise you imitate this leap,

Put faith to proof, be cured or killed at once! .
 Call you men, killed through cutting cancer out,
 The worse for such an act of bravery?
 That's more than *I* know. In my estimate,
 Better lie prostrate on his turf at peace, 360
 Than, wistful, eye, from out the tent, the tower,
 Racked with a doubt "Will going on bare knees
 All the way to The Ravissante and back,
 Saying my Ave Mary all the time,
 Somewhat excuse if I postpone my march?
 — Make due amends for that one kiss I gave
 In gratitude to her who held me out
 Superior Fricquot's sermon, hot from press,
 A-spread with hands so sinful yet so smooth?"

And now, sincerely do I pray she stand, 370
 Clara, with interposing sweep of robe,
 Between us and this horror! Any screen
 Turns white by contrast with the tragic pall;
 And her dubiety distracts at least,
 As well as snow, from such decided black.
 With womanhood, at least, we have to do:
 Ending with Clara — is the word too kind?

Let pass the shock! There's poignancy enough
 When what one parted with, a minute since,
 Alive and happy, is returned a wreck — 380
 All that was, all that seemed about to be,
 Razed out and ruined now for evermore,
 Because a straw descended on this scale
 Rather than that, made death o'erbalance life.
 But think of cage-mates in captivity,
 Inured to day-long, night-long vigilance
 Each of the other's tread and angry turn
 If behind prison-bars the jailer knocked:

These whom society shut out, and thus
 Penned in, to settle down and regulate 390
 By the strange law, the solitary life —
 When death divorces such a fellowship,
 Theirs may pair off with that prodigious woe
 Imagined of a ghastly brotherhood —
 One watcher left in lighthouse out at sea
 With leagues of surf between the land and him
 Alive with his dead partner on the rock;
 One galley-slave, whom curse and blow compel
 To labor on, ply oar — beside his chain,
 Encumbered with a corpse-companion now. 400
 Such these: although, no prisoners, self-entrenched
 They kept the world off from their barricade.

Memory, gratitude was poignant, sure,
 Though pride brought consolation of a kind.
 Twenty years long had Clara been — of whom
 The rival, nay, the victor, past dispute?
 What if in turn The Ravissante at length
 Proved victor — which was doubtful — anyhow,
 Here lay the inconstant with, conspicuous too,
 The fruit of his good fortune!

“Has he gained 410
 By leaving me?” she might soliloquize:
 “All love could do, I did for him. I learned
 By heart his nature, what he loved and loathed,
 Leaned to with liking, turned from with distaste.
 No matter what his least velleity,
 I was determined he should want no wish,
 And in conformity administered
 To his requirement; most of joy I mixed
 With least of sorrow in life’s daily draught,
 Twenty years long, life’s proper average. 420

And when he got to quarrel with my cup,
 Would needs outsweeten honey, and discard
 That gall-drop we require lest nectar cloy, —
 I did not call him fool, and vex my friend,
 But quietly allowed experiment,
 Encouraged him to spice his drink, and now
 Grate *lignum vitæ*, now bruise so-called grains
 Of Paradise, and pour now, for perfume,
 Distilment rare, the rose of Jericho,
 Holy-thorn, passion-flower, and what know I? 430
 Till beverage obtained the fancied smack.

'T was wild-flower-wine that neither helped nor
 harmed

Who sipped and held it for restorative —
 What harm? But here has he been through the
 hedge

Straying in search of simples, while my back
 Was turned a minute, and he finds a prize,
 Monkshood and belladonna! O my child,
 My truant little boy, despite the beard,
 The body two feet broad and six feet long,
 And what the calendar counts middle age — 440
 You wanted, did you, to enjoy a flight?

Why not have taken into confidence
 Me, that was mother to you? — never mind
 What mock disguise of mistress held you mine!
 Had you come laughing, crying, with request
 'Make me fly, mother!' I had run upstairs
 And held you tight the while I danced you high
 In air from tower-top, singing 'Off we go
 (On pilgrimage to Lourdes some day next month)
 And swift we soar (to Rome with Peter-pence) 450
 And low we light (at Paris where we pick
 Another jewel from our store of stones
 And send it for a present to the Pope)!'

So, dropt indeed you were, but on my knees,
Rolling and crowing, not a whit the worse
For journey to your Ravissante and back.
Now, no more Clairvaux — which I made you build,
And think an inspiration of your own —
No more fine house, trim garden, pretty park,
Nothing I used to busy you about, 460
And make believe you worked for my surprise!
What weariness to me will work become
Now that I need not seem surprised again!
This boudoir, for example, with the doves
(My stupid maid has damaged, dusting one)
Embossed in stucco o'er the looking-glass
Beside the toilet-table! dear — dear me!"

Here she looked up from her absorbing grief,
And round her, crow-like grouped, the Cousinry,
(She grew aware) sat witnesses at watch. 470
For, two days had elapsed since fate befell
The courser in the meadow, stretched so stark.
They did not cluster on the tree-tops, close
Their sooty ranks, caw and confabulate
For nothing: but, like calm determined crows,
They came to take possession of their corpse.
And who shall blame them? Had not they the right?

One spoke. "They would be gentle, not austere.
They understood and were compassionate.
Madame Muhlhausen lay too abject now 480
For aught but the sincerest pity; still,
Since plain speech salves the wound it seems to make,
They must speak plainly — circumstances spoke!
Sin had conceived and brought forth death indeed.
As the commencement so the close of things:
Just what might be expected all along!

Monsieur Léonce Miranda launched his youth
 Into a cesspool of debauchery,
 And if he thence emerged all dripping slime,
 Where was the change except from thin to thick, 490
 One warm rich mud-bath, Madame? — you, in place
 Of Paris-drainage and distilment, you
 He never needed budge from, boiled to rags!
 True, some good instinct left the natural man,
 Some touch of that deep dye wherewith imbued
 By education, in his happier day,
 The hopeful offspring of high parentage
 Was fleece-marked moral and religious sheep, —
 Some ruddle, faint remainder, (we admit)
 Stuck to Miranda, rubbed he ne'er so rude 500
 Against the goatly coarseness: to the last,
 Moral he styled himself, religious too!
 Which means — what ineradicable good
 You found, you never left till good's self proved
 Perversion and distortion, nursed to growth
 So monstrous, that the tree-stock, dead and dry,
 Were seemlier far than such a heap grotesque
 Of fungous flourishing excrescence. Here
 Sap-like affection, meant for family,
 Stole off to feed one sucker fat — yourself; 510
 While branchage, trained religiously aloft
 To rear its head in reverence to the sun,
 Was pulled down earthward, pegged and picketed,
 By topiary contrivance, till the tree
 Became an arbor where, at vulgar ease,
 Sat superstition grinning through the loops.
 Still, nature is too strong or else too weak
 For cockney treatment: either, tree springs back
 To pristine shape, or else degraded droops,
 And turns to touchwood at the heart. So here — 520
 Body and mind, at last the man gave way.

His body — there it lies, what part was left
Unmutilated! for, the strife commenced
Two years ago, when both hands burnt to ash,
— A branch broke loose, by loss of what choice twigs!
As for his mind — behold our register
Of all its moods, from the incipient mad,
Nay, mere erratic, to the stark insane,
Absolute idiocy or what is worse!
All have we catalogued — extravagance 530
In worldly matters, luxury absurd,
And zeal as crazed in its expenditure
Of nonsense called devotion. Don't we know
— We Cousins, bound in duty to our kin, —
What mummeries were practised by you two
At Clairvaux? Not a servant got discharge
But came and told his grievance, testified
To acts which turn religion to a farce.
And as the private mock, so patent — see —
The public scandal! Ask the neighborhood — 540
Or rather, since we asked them long ago,
Read what they answer, depositions down,
Signed, sealed and sworn to! Brief, the man was
mad.

We are his heirs and claim our heritage.
Madame Muhlhausen, — whom good taste forbids
We qualify as do these documents, —
Fear not lest justice stifle mercy's prayer!
True, had you lent a willing ear at first,
Had you obeyed our call two years ago,
Restrained a certain insolence of eye, 550
A volubility of tongue, that time,
Your prospects had been none the worse, perhaps.
Still, fear not but a decent competence
Shall smooth the way for your declining age!
What we propose, then . . .”

Clara dried her eyes,
 Sat up, surveyed the consistory, spoke
 After due pause, with something of a smile.

“Gentlemen, kinsfolk of my friend defunct,
 In thus addressing me — of all the world! —
 You much misapprehend what part I play. 560
 I claim no property you speak about.
 You might as well address the park-keeper,
 Harangue him on some plan advisable
 For covering the park with cottage-plots.
 He is the servant, no proprietor,
 His business is to see the sward kept trim,
 Untrespassed over by the indiscreet:
 Beyond that, he refers you to myself —
 Another servant of another kind —
 Who again — quite as limited in act — 570
 Refer you, with your projects, — can I else?
 To who in mastery is ultimate,
 The Church. The Church is sole administrant,
 Since sole possessor of what worldly wealth
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda late possessed.
 Often enough has he attempted, nay,
 Forced me, well-nigh, to occupy the post
 You seemingly suppose I fill, — receive
 As gift the wealth entrusted me as grace.
 This — for quite other reasons than appear 580
 So cogent to your perspicacity —
 This I refused; and, firm as you could wish,
 Still was my answer ‘We two understand
 Each one the other. I am intimate
 — As how can be mere fools and knaves — or, say,
 Even your Cousins? — with your love to me,
 Devotion to the Church. Would Providence
 Appoint, and make me certain of the same,

That I survive you (which is little like,
Seeing you hardly overpass my age 590
And more than match me in abundant health)
In such case, certainly I would accept
Your bounty: better I than alien hearts
Should execute your planned benevolence
To man, your proposed largess to the Church.
But though I be survivor, — weakly frame,
With only woman's wit to make amends, —
When I shall die, or while I am alive,
Cannot you figure me an easy mark
For hypocritical rapacity, 600
Kith, kin and generation, couching low,
Ever on the alert to pounce on prey?
Far be it I should say they profited
By that first frenzy-fit themselves induced, —
Cold-blooded scenical buffoons at sport
With horror and damnation o'er a grave:
That were too shocking — I absolve them there!
Nor did they seize the moment of your swoon
To rifle pocket, wring a paper thence,
Their Cousinly dictation, and enrich 610
Thereby each mother's son as heart could wish,
Had nobody supplied a codicil.
But when the pain, poor friend! had prostrated
Your body, though your soul was right once more,
I fear they turned your weakness to account!
Why else to me, who agonizing watched,
Snack, cap in hand, now bribe me to forsake
My maimed Léonce, now bully, cap on head,
The impudent pretension to assuage
Such sorrows as demanded Cousins' care? — 620
*For you rejected, hated, fled me, far
In foreign lands you laughed at me! — they judged.
And, think you, will the unkind ones hesitate*

To try conclusions with my helplessness, —
 To pounce on and misuse your derelict,
 Helped by advantage that bereavement lends
 Folk, who, while yet you lived, played tricks like
 these?

You only have to die, and they detect,
 In all you said and did, insanity!
 Your faith was fetish-worship, your regard 630
 For Christ's prime precept which endows the poor
 And strips the rich, a craze from first to last!
 They so would limn your likeness, paint your life,
 That if it ended by some accident, —
 For instance, if, attempting to arrange
 The plants below that dangerous Belvedere
 I cannot warn you from sufficiently,
 You lost your balance and fell headlong — fine
 Occasion, such, for crying *Suicide*!

Non compos mentis, naturally next, 640
 Hands over Clairvaux to a Cousin-tribe
 Who nor like me nor love The Ravissante:
 Therefore be ruled by both! Life-interest
 In Clairvaux, — conservation, guardianship
 Of earthly good for heavenly purpose, — give
 Such and no other proof of confidence!
 Let Clara represent the Ravissante!
 — To whom accordingly, he then and there
 Bequeathed each stick and stone, by testament
 In holograph, mouth managing the quill: 650
 Go, see the same in Londres, if you doubt!"

Then smile grew laugh, as sudden up she stood
 And out she spoke: intemperate the speech!
 "And now, sirs, for your special courtesy,
 Your candle held up to the character
 Of Lucie Steiner, whom you qualify

As coming short of perfect womanhood.
Yes, kindly critics, truth for once you tell!
True is it that through childhood, poverty,
Sloth, pressure of temptation, I succumbed, 660
And, ere I found what honor meant, lost mine.
So was the sheep lost, which the Shepherd found
And never lost again. My friend found me;
Or better say, the Shepherd found us both —
Since he, my friend, was much in the same mire
When first we made acquaintance. Each helped
each, —

A two-fold extrication from the slough;
And, saving me, he saved himself. Since then,
Unsmirched we kept our cleanliness of coat.
It is his perfect constancy, you call 670
My friend's main fault — he never left his love!
While as for me, I dare your worst, impute
One breach of loving bond, these twenty years,
To me whom only cobwebs bound, you count!
'He was religiously disposed in youth!'
That may be, though we did not meet at church.
Under my teaching did he, like you scamps,
Become Voltairian — fools who mock his faith?
'Infirm of body!' I am silent there:
Even yourselves acknowledge service done, 680
Whatever motive your own souls supply
As inspiration. Love made labor light."

Then laugh grew frown, and frown grew terrible.
Do recollect what sort of person shrieked —
"Such was I, saint or sinner, what you please:
And who is it casts stone at me but you?
By your own showing, sirs, you bought and sold,
Took what advantage bargain promised bag,
Abundantly did business, and with whom?

The man whom you pronounce imbecile, push 690
 Indignantly aside if he presume
 To settle his affairs like other folk!
 How is it you have stepped into his shoes
 And stand there, bold as brass, 'Miranda, late,
 Now, Firm-Miranda'? Sane, he signed away
 That little birthright did he? Hence to trade!
 I know and he knew who 't was dipped and ducked,
 Truckled and played the parasite in vain,
 As now one, now the other, here you cringed, 699
 Were feasted, took our presents, you — those drops
 Just for your wife's adornment! you — that spray
 Exactly suiting, as most diamonds would,
 Your daughter on her marriage! No word then
 Of somebody the wanton! Hence, I say,
 Subscribers to the *Siècle*, every snob —
 For here the post brings me the *Univers*!
 Home and make money in the Place Vendôme,
 Sully yourselves no longer by my sight,
 And, when next Schneider wants a new *parure*,
 Be careful lest you stick there by mischance 710
 That stone beyond compare entrusted you
 To kindle faith with, when, Miranda's gift,
 Crowning the very crown, the Ravissante
 Shall claim it! As to Clairvaux — talk to Her!
 She answers by the Chapter of Raimbaux!"
 Vituperative, truly! All this wrath
 Because the man's relations thought him mad!
 Whereat, I hope you see the Cousinry
 Turn each to other, blankly dolorous,
 Consult a moment, more by shrug and shrug 720
 Than mere man's language, — finally conclude
 To leave the reprobate untroubled now
 In her unholy triumph, till the Law
 Shall right the injured ones; for gentlemen

Allow the female sex, this sort at least,
Its privilege. So, simply "Cockatrice!" —
"Jezebel!" — "Queen of the Camellias!" — cried
Cousin to cousin, as yon hinge a-creak
Shut out the party, and the gate returned
To custody of Clairvaux. "Pretty place! 730
What say you, when it proves our property,
To trying a concurrence with La Roche,
And laying down a rival oyster-bed?
Where the park ends, the sea begins, you know."
So took they comfort till they came to Vire.

But I would linger, fain to snatch a look
At Clara as she stands in pride of place,
Somewhat more satisfying than my glance
So furtive, so near futile, yesterday,
Because one must be courteous. Of the masks 740
That figure in this little history,
She only has a claim to my respect,
And one-eyed, in her French phrase, rules the blind.
Miranda hardly did his best with life:
He might have opened eye, exerted brain,
Attained conception as to right and law
In certain points respecting intercourse
Of man with woman — love, one likes to say;
Which knowledge had dealt rudely with the claim
Of Clara to play representative 750
And from perdition rescue soul, forsooth!
Also, the sense of him should have sufficed
For building up some better theory
Of how God operates in heaven and earth,
Than would establish Him participant
In doings yonder at the Ravissante.
The heart was wise according to its lights
And limits; but the head refused more sun,

And shrank into its mew and craved less space.
 Clara, I hold the happier specimen, — 760
 It may be, through that artist-preference
 For work complete, inferiorly proposed,
 To incompletion, though it aim aright.
 Morally, no! Aspire, break bounds! I say,
 Endeavor to be good, and better still,
 And best! Success is naught, endeavor's all.
 But intellect adjusts the means to ends,
 Tries the low thing, and leaves it done, at least;
 No prejudice to high thing, intellect
 Would do and will do, only give the means. 770
 Miranda, in my picture-gallery,
 Presents a Blake; be Clara — Meissonier!
 Merely considered so by artist, mind!
 For, break through Art and rise to poetry,
 Being Art to tremble nearer, touch enough
 The verge of vastness to inform our soul
 What orb makes transit through the dark above,
 And there's the triumph! — there the incomplete,
 More than completion, matches the immense, —
 Then, Michelagnolo against the world! 780
 With this proviso, let me study her
 Approvingly, the finished little piece!
 Born, bred, with just one instinct, — that of
 growth, —
 Her quality was, caterpillar-like,
 To all-unerringly select a leaf
 And without intermission feed her fill,
 Become the Painted-peacock, or belike
 The Brimstone-wing, when time of year should suit,
 And 't is a sign (say entomologists)
 Of sickness, when the creature stops its meal 790
 One minute, either to look up at heaven,
 Or turn aside for change of aliment.

No doubt there was a certain ugliness
In the beginning, as the grub grew worm:
She could not find the proper plant at once,
But crawled and fumbled through a whole parterre.
Husband Muhlhausen served for stuff not long:
Then came confusion of the slimy track
From London, "where she gave the tone awhile,"
To Paris: let the stalks start up again, 800
Now she is off them, all the greener they!
But, settled on Miranda, how she sucked,
Assimilated juices, took the tint,
Mimicked the form and texture of her food!
Was he for pastime? Who so frolic-fond
As Clara? Had he a devotion-fit?
Clara grew serious with like qualm, be sure!
In health and strength he, — healthy too and strong,
She danced, rode, drove, took pistol-practice, fished,
Nay, "managed sea-skiff with consummate skill." 810
In pain and weakness, he, — she patient watched
And wiled the slow drip-dropping hours away.
She bound again the broken self-respect,
She picked out the true meaning from mistake,
Praised effort in each stumble, laughed "Well-
climbed!"

When others groaned "None ever grovelled so!"
"Rise, you have gained experience!" was her word:
"Lie satisfied, the ground is just your place!"
They thought appropriate counsel. "Live, not die,
And take my full life to eke out your own: 820
That shall repay me and with interest!
Write! — is your mouth not clever as my hand?
Paint! — the last Exposition warrants me,
Plenty of people must ply brush with toes.
And as for music — look, what folk nickname
A lyre, those ancients played to ravishment, —

Over the *pendule*, see, Apollo grasps
 A three-stringed gimcrack which no Liszt could coax
 Such music from as jew's-harp makes to-day!
 Do your endeavor like a man, and leave 830
 The rest to 'fortune who assists the bold' —
 Learn, you, the Latin which you taught me first,
 You clever creature — clever, yes, I say!"

If he smiled "Let us love, love's wrong comes right,
 Shows reason last of all! Necessity
 Must meanwhile serve for plea — so, mind not much
 Old Fricquot's menace!" — back she smiled "Who
 minds?"

If he sighed "Ah, but She is strict, they say,
 For all Her mercy at the Ravissante,
 She scarce will be put off so!" — straight a sigh 840
 Returned "My lace must go to trim Her gown!"
 I nowise doubt she inwardly believed
 Smiling and sighing had the same effect
 Upon the venerated image. What
 She did believe in, I as little doubt,
 Was — Clara's self's own birthright to sustain
 Existence, grow from grub to butterfly,
 Upon unlimited Miranda-leaf;
 In which prime article of faith confirmed,
 According to capacity, she fed 850
 On and on till the leaf was eaten up
 That April morning. Even then, I praise
 Her forethought which prevented leafless stalk
 Bestowing any hoarded succulence
 On earwig and blackbeetle squat beneath
 Clairvaux, that stalk whereto her hermitage
 She tacked by golden throw of silk, so fine,
 So anything but feeble, that her sleep
 Inside it, through last winter, two years long,

Recked little of the storm and strife without. 860
“But — loved him?” Friend, I do not praise her
love!

True love works never for the loved one so,
Nor spares skin-surface, smoothening truth away.
Love bids touch truth, endure truth, and embrace
Truth, though, embracing truth, love crush itself.

“Worship not me but God!” the angels urge:
That is love’s grandeur; still, in pettier love
The nice eye can distinguish grade and grade.
Shall mine degrade the velvet green and puce
Of caterpillar, palmer-worm — or what — 870

Ball in and out of ball, each ball with brush
Of Venus’ eye-fringe round the turquoise egg
That nestles soft, — compare such paragon
With any scarabæus of the brood
Which, born to fly, keeps wing in wing-case, walks
Persistently a-trundling dung on earth?

Egypt may venerate such hierophants,
Not I — the couple yonder, Father Priest
And Mother Nun, who came and went and came,
Beset this Clairvaux, trundled money-muck 880
To midden and the main heap oft enough,
But never bade unshut from sheath the gauze,
Nor showed that, who would fly, must let fall
filth,

And warn “Your jewel, brother, is a blotch:
Sister, your lace trails ordure! Leave your sins,
And so best gift with Crown and grace with Robe!”

The superstition is extinct, you hope?
It were, with my good will! Suppose it so,
Bethink you likewise of the latest use
Whereto a Night-cap is convertible, 890
And draw your very thickest, thread and thrum,

O'er such a decomposing face of things,
Once so alive, it seemed immortal too!

This happened two years since. The Cousinry
Returned to Paris, called in help from Law,
And in due form proceeded to dispute
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's competence,
Being insane, to make a valid Will.

Much testimony volunteered itself;
The issue hardly could be doubtful — but 900
For that sad 'Seventy which must intervene,
Provide poor France with other work to mind
Than settling lawsuits, even for the sake
Of such a party as the Ravissante.
It only was this Summer that the case
Could come and be disposed of, two weeks since,
At Vire — Tribunal Civil — Chamber First.

Here, issued with all regularity,
I hold the judgment — just, inevitable,
Nowise to be contested by what few 910
Can judge the judges; sum and substance, thus —

“Inasmuch as we find, the Cousinry,
During that very period when they take
Monsieur Léonce Miranda for stark mad,
Considered him to be quite sane enough
For doing much important business with —
Nor showed suspicion of his competence
Until, by turning of the tables, loss
Instead of gain accrued to them thereby, —
Plea of incompetence we set aside. 920

— “The rather, that the dispositions, sought
To be impugned, are natural and right,

Nor jar with any reasonable claim
Of kindred, friendship or acquaintance here.
Nobody is despoiled, none overlooked;
Since the testator leaves his property
To just that person whom, of all the world,
He counted he was most indebted to.
In mere discharge, then, of conspicuous debt,
Madame Muhlhausen has priority, 930
Enjoys the usufruct of Clairvaux.

“Next,
Such debt discharged, such life determining,
Such earthly interest provided for,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda may bequeath,
In absence of more fit recipient, fund
And usufruct together to the Church
Whereof he was a special devotee.

“— Which disposition, being consonant
With a long series of such acts and deeds
Notorious in his life-time, needs must stand, 940
Unprejudiced by eccentricity
Nowise amounting to distemper: since,
In every instance signalized as such,
We recognize no overleaping bounds,
No straying out of the permissible:
Duty to the Religion of the Land, —
Neither excessive nor inordinate.

“The minor accusations are dismissed;
They prove mere freak and fancy, boyish mood
In age mature of simple kindly man. 950
Exuberant in generosities
To all the world: no fact confirms the fear
He meditated mischief to himself

That morning when he met the accident
Which ended fatally. The case is closed."

How otherwise? So, when I grazed the skirts,
And had the glimpse of who made, yesterday, —
Woman and retinue of goats and sheep, —
The sombre path one whiteness, vision-like,
As out of gate, and in at gate again, 960
They wavered, — she was lady there for life:
And, after life — I hope, a white success
Of some sort, wheresoever life resume
School interrupted by vacation — death;
Seeing that home she goes with prize in hand,
Confirmed the Châtelaine of Clairvaux.

True,

Such prize fades soon to insignificance.
Though she have eaten her Miranda up,
And spun a cradle-cone through which she pricks
Her passage, and proves Peacock-butterfly 970
This Autumn — wait a little week of cold!
Peacock and death's-head-moth end much the same.
And could she still continue spinning, — sure,
Cradle would soon crave shroud for substitute,
And o'er this life of hers distaste would drop
Red-cotton-Night-cap-wise.

How say you, friend?
Have I redeemed my promise? Smile assent
Through the dark Winter-gloom between us both!
Already, months ago and miles away,
I just as good as told you, in a flash, 980
The while we paced the sands before my house,
All this poor story — truth and nothing else.

Accept that moment's flashing, amplified,
Impalpability reduced to speech,
Conception proved by birth, — no other change!
Can what Saint-Rambert flashed me in a thought,
Good gloomy London make a poem of?
Such ought to be whatever dares precede,
Play ruddy herald-star to your white blaze
About to bring us day. How fail imbibe 990
Some foretaste of effulgence? Sun shall wax,
And star shall wane: what matter, so star tell
The drowsy world to start awake, rub eyes,
And stand all ready for morn's joy a-blush?

January 23, 1873.

THE INN ALBUM

1875

I

“THAT oblong book ’s the Album; hand it here!
Exactly! page on page of gratitude
For breakfast, dinner, supper, and the view!
I praise these poets: they leave margin-space;
Each stanza seems to gather skirts around,
And primly, trimly, keep the foot’s confine,
Modest and maidlike; lubber prose o’ersprawls
And straddling stops the path from left to right.
Since I want space to do my cipher-work,
Which poem spares a corner? What comes first? 10
‘Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!’
(Open the window, we burn daylight, boy!)
Or see — succincter beauty, brief and bold —
*‘If a fellow can dine On rumpsteaks and port wine,
He needs not despair Of dining well here —’*
‘Here!’ I myself could find a better rhyme!
That bard ’s a Browning; he neglects the form:
But ah, the sense, ye gods, the weighty sense!
Still, I prefer this classic. Ay, throw wide!
I’ll quench the bits of candle yet unburnt. 20
A minute’s fresh air, then to cipher-work!
Three little columns hold the whole account:
Ecarté, after which Blind Hookey, then
Cutting-the-Pack, five hundred pounds the cut.
’Tis easy reckoning: I have lost, I think.”

Two personages occupy this room
Shabby-genteel, that ’s parlor to the inn

Perched on a view-commanding eminence;
 — Inn which may be a veritable house 29
 Where somebody once lived and pleased good taste
 Till tourists found his coign of vantage out,
 And fingered blunt the individual mark
 And vulgarized things comfortably smooth.
 On a sprig-pattern-papered wall there brays
 Complaint to sky Sir Edwin's dripping stag;
 His couchant coast-guard creature corresponds;
 They face the Huguenot and Light o' the World.
 Grim o'er the mirror on the mantelpiece,
 Varnished and confined, *Salmo ferox* glares
 — Possibly at the List of Wines which, framed 40
 And glazed, hangs somewhat prominent on peg.

So much describes the stuffy little room —
 Vulgar flat smooth respectability:
 Not so the burst of landscape surging in,
 Sunrise and all, as he who of the pair
 Is, plain enough, the younger personage
 Draws sharp the shrieking curtain, sends aloft
 The sash, spreads wide and fastens back to wall
 Shutter and shutter, shows you England's best.
 He leans into a living glory-bath 50
 Of air and light where seems to float and move
 The wooded watered country, hill and dale
 And steel-bright thread of stream, a-smoke with mist,
 A-sparkle with May morning, diamond drift
 O' the sun-touched dew. Except the red-roofed
 patch
 Of half a dozen dwellings that, crept close
 For hill-side shelter, make the village-clump,
 This inn is perched above to dominate —
 Except such sign of human neighborhood,
 (And this surmised rather than sensible) 60

There's nothing to disturb absolute peace,
The reign of English nature — which means art
And civilized existence. Wildness' self
Is just the cultured triumph. Presently
Deep solitude, be sure, reveals a Place
That knows the right way to defend itself:
Silence hems round a burning spot of life.
Now, where a Place burns, must a village brood,
And where a village broods, an inn should boast —
Close and convenient: here you have them both. 70
This inn, the Something-arms — the family's —
(Don't trouble Guillim: heralds leave out half!)
Is dear to lovers of the picturesque,
And epics have been planned here; but who plan
Take holy orders and find work to do.
Painters are more productive, stop a week,
Declare the prospect quite a Corot, — ay,
For tender sentiment, — themselves incline
Rather to handsweep large and liberal;
Then go, but not without success achieved 80
— Haply some pencil-drawing, oak or beech,
Ferns at the base and ivies up the bole,
On this a slug, on that a butterfly.
Nay, he who hooked the *salmo* pendent here,
Also exhibited, this same May-month,
“*Foxgloves: a study*” — so inspires the scene,
The air — which now the younger personage
Inflates him with till lungs o'erfraught are fain
Sigh forth a satisfaction might bestir
Even those tufts of tree-tops to the South 90
I' the distance where the green dies off to gray,
Which, easy of conjecture, front the Place;
He eyes them, elbows wide, each hand to cheek.
His fellow, the much older — either say
A youngish-old man or man oldish-young —

Sits at the table: wicks are noisome-deep
 In wax, to detriment of plated ware;
 Above — piled, strewn — is store of playing-cards,
 Counters and all that 's proper for a game.
 He sets down, rubs out figures in the book, 100
 Adds and subtracts, puts back here, carries there,
 Until the summed-up satisfaction stands
 Apparent, and he pauses o'er the work:
 Soothes what of brain was busy under brow,
 By passage of the hard palm, curing so
 Wrinkle and crowfoot for a second's space;
 Then lays down book and laughs out. No mistake,
 Such the sum-total — ask Colenso else!

Roused by which laugh, the other turns, laughs too —
 The youth, the good strong fellow, rough perhaps. 110

“Well, what 's the damage — three, or four, or five?
 How many figures in a row! Hand here!
 Come now, there 's one expense all yours not mine —
 Scribbling the people's Album over, leaf
 The first and foremost too! You think, perhaps,
 They 'll only charge you for a brand-new book
 Nor estimate the literary loss?
 Wait till the small account comes! ‘*To one night's
 Lodging,*’ — for ‘beds,’ they can't say, — ‘*pound or
 so;*

Dinner, Apollinaris, — what they please, 120
Attendance not included;’ last looms large
 ‘*Defacement of our Album, late enriched
 With*’ — let 's see what! Here, at the window,
 though!

Ay, breathe the morning and forgive your luck!
 Fine enough country for a fool like me
 To own, as next month I suppose I shall!

Eh? True fool's-fortune! so console yourself.
 Let's see, however — hand the book, I say!
 Well, you've improved the classic by romance.
 Queer reading! Verse with parenthetical prose 130
'Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!'
 (Three-two fives) *'life how profitably spent'*
 (Five-naught, five-nine fives) *'yonder humble cot,'*
 (More and more naughts and fives) *'in mild content;*
And did my feelings find the natural vent
In friendship and in love, how blest my lot!'
 Then follow the dread figures — five! *'Content!'*
 That's apposite! Are you content as he —
 Simpkin the sonneteer? *Ten thousand pounds*
 Give point to his effusion — by so much 140
 Leave me the richer and the poorer you
 After our night's play; who's content the most,
 I, you, or Simpkin?"

So the polished snob.

The elder man, refinement every inch
 From brow to boot-end, quietly replies:

"Simpkin's no name I know. I had my whim."

"Ay, had you! And such things make friendship
 thick.

Intimates I may boast we were; henceforth,
 Friends — shall it not be? — who discard reserve,
 Use plain words, put each dot upon each i, 150
 Till death us twain do part? The bargain's struck!
 Old fellow, if you fancy — (to begin —)
 I failed to penetrate your scheme last week,
 You wrong your poor disciple. Oh, no airs!
 Because you happen to be twice my age
 And twenty times my master, must perforce
 No blink of daylight struggle through the web

There's no unwinding? You entoil my legs,
 And welcome, for I like it: blind me, — no!
 A very pretty piece of shuttle-work 160
 Was that — your mere chance question at the club —
'Do you go anywhere this Whitsuntide?
I'm off for Paris, there's the Opera — there's
The Salon, there's a china-sale, — beside
Chantilly; and, for good companionship,
There's Such-and-such and So-and-so. Suppose
We start together?' 'No such holiday!'
 I told you: *'Paris and the rest be hanged!*
Why plague me who am pledged to home-delights? 169
I'm the engaged now; through whose fault but yours?
On duty. As you well know. Don't I drowse
The week away down with the Aunt and Niece?
No help: it's leisure, loneliness and love.
Wish I could take you; but fame travels fast,' —
A man of much newspaper-paragraph,
You scare domestic circles; and beside
Would not you like your lot, that second taste
Of nature and approval of the grounds!
You might walk early or lie late, so shirk
Week-day devotions: but stay Sunday o'er, 180
And morning church is obligatory:
No mundane garb permissible, or dread
The butler's privileged monition! No!
Pack off to Paris, nor wipe tear away!'
 Whereon how artlessly the happy flash
 Followed, by inspiration! *"Tell you what —*
Let's turn their flank, try things on t'other side!
Inns for my money! Liberty's the life!
We'll lie in hiding: there's the crow-nest nook,
The tourist's joy, the Inn they rave about,
Inn that's out — out of sight and out of mind
And out of mischief to all four of us — 190

Aunt and niece, you and me. At night arrive:
At morn, find time for just a Pisgah-view
Of my friend's Land of Promise; then depart.
And while I'm whizzing onward by first train,
Bound for our own place (since my Brother sulks
And says I shun him like the plague) yourself —
Why, you have stepped thence, start from platform, gay
Despite the sleepless journey, — love lends wings, —
Hug aunt and niece who, none the wiser, wait 201
The faithful advent! Eh? 'With all my heart,'
 Said I to you; said I to mine own self:
'Does he believe I fail to comprehend
He wants just one more final friendly snack
At friend's exchequer ere friend runs to earth,
Marries, renounces yielding friends such sport?'
 And did I spoil sport, pull face grim, — nay, grave?
 Your pupil does you better credit! No! 209
 I parleyed with my pass-book, — rubbed my pair
 At the big balance in my banker's hands, —
 Folded a cheque cigar-case-shape, — just wants
 Filling and signing, — and took train, resolved
 To execute myself with decency
 And let you win — if not Ten thousand quite,
 Something by way of wind-up-farewell burst
 Of firework-nosegay! Where's your fortune fled?
 Or is not fortune constant after all?
 You lose ten thousand pounds: had I lost half
 Or half that, I should bite my lips, I think. 220
 You man of marble! Strut and stretch my best
 On tiptoe, I shall never reach your height.
 How does the loss feel! Just one lesson more!"

The more refined man smiles a frown away.

"The lesson shall be — only boys like you
 Put such a question at the present stage.

I had a ball lodge in my shoulder once,
 And, full five minutes, never guessed the fact;
 Next day, I felt decidedly: and still,
 At twelve years' distance, when I lift my arm 230
 A twinge reminds me of the surgeon's probe.
 Ask me, this day month, how I feel my luck!
 And meantime please to stop impertinence,
 For — don't I know its object? All this chaff
 Covers the corn, this preface leads to speech,
 This boy stands forth a hero. *'There, my lord!*
Our play was true play, fun not earnest! I
Empty your purse, inside out, while my poke
Bulges to bursting? You can badly spare
A doit, confess now, Duke though brother be! 240
While I'm gold-daubed so thickly, spangles drop
And show my father's warehouse-apron: pshaw!
Enough! We've had a palpitating night!
Good morning! Breakfast and forget our dreams!
My mouth's shut, mind! I tell nor man nor mouse.'
 There, see! He don't deny it. Thanks, my boy!
 Hero and welcome — only, not on me
 Make trial of your 'prentice-hand! Enough!
 We've played, I've lost and owe ten thousand
 pounds,
 Whereof I muster, at the moment, — well, 250
 What's for the bill here and the back to town.
 Still, I've my little character to keep:
 You may expect your money at month's end."
 The young man at the window turns round quick —
 A clumsy giant handsome creature; grasps
 In his large red the little lean white hand
 Of the other, looks him in the sallow face.

"I say now — is it right to so mistake
 A fellow, force him in mere self-defence

To spout like Mister *Mild Acclivity* 260
 In album-language? You know well enough
 Whether I like you — *like* 's no album-word
 Anyhow: point me to one soul beside
 In the wide world I care one straw about!
 I first set eyes on you a year ago;
 Since when you 've done me good — I 'll stick to it —
 More than I got in the whole twenty-five
 That make my life up, Oxford years and all —
 Throw in the three I fooled away abroad,
 Seeing myself and nobody more sage 270
 Until I met you, and you made me man
 Such as the sort is and the fates allow.
 I do think, since we two kept company,
 I 've learnt to know a little — all through you!
 It 's nature if I like you. Taunt away!
 As if I need you teaching me my place —
 The snob I am, the Duke your brother is,
 When just the good you did was — teaching me
 My own trade, how a snob and millionaire 280
 May lead his life and let the Duke's alone,
 Clap wings, free jackdaw, on his steeple-perch,
 Burnish his black to gold in sun and air,
 Nor pick up stray plumes, strive to match in strut
 Regular peacocks who can't fly an inch
 Over the courtyard-paling. Head and heart
 (That 's album-style) are older than you know,
 For all your knowledge: boy, perhaps — ay, boy
 Had his adventure, just as he were man —
 His ball-experience in the shoulder-blade,
 His bit of life-long ache to recognize, 290
 Although he bears it cheerily about,
 Because you came and clapped him on the back,
 Advised him '*Walk and wear the aching off!*'
 Why, I was minded to sit down for life

Just in Dalmatia, build a sea-side tower
 High on a rock, and so expend my days
 Pursuing chemistry or botany
 Or, very like, astronomy because
 I noticed stars shone when I passed the place:
 Letting my cash accumulate the while 300
 In England — to lay out in lump at last
 As Ruskin should direct me! All or some
 Of which should I have done or tried to do,
 And preciousy repented, one fine day,
 Had you discovered Timon, climbed his rock
 And scaled his tower, some ten years thence, suppose,
 And coaxed his story from him! Don't I see
 The pair conversing! It's a novel writ
 Already, I'll be bound, — our dialogue!
 'What?' cried the elder and yet youthful man — 310
 So did the eye flash 'neath the lordly front,
 And the imposing presence swell with scorn,
 As the haught high-bred bearing and dispose
 Contrasted with his interlocutor
 The flabby low-born who, of bulk before,
 Had steadily increased, one stone per week,
 Since his abstention from horse-exercise: —
 'What? you, as rich as Rothschild, left, you say,
 London the very year you came of age,
 Because your father manufactured goods — 320
 Commission-agent hight of Manchester —
 Partly, and partly through a baby case
 Of disappointment I've pumped out at last —
 And here you spend life's prime in gaining flesh
 And giving science one more asteroid?'
 Brief, my dear fellow, you instructed me,
 At Alfred's and not Istria! proved a snob
 May turn a million to account although
 His brother be no Duke, and see good days

Without the girl he lost and some one gained. 330
 The end is, after one year's tutelage,
 Having, by your help, touched society,
 Polo, Tent-pegging, Hurlingham, the Rink —
 I leave all these delights, by your advice,
 And marry my young pretty cousin here
 Whose place, whose oaks ancestral you behold.
 (Her father was in partnership with mine —
 Does not his purchase look a pedigree?)
 My million will be tails and tassels smart
 To this plump-bodied kite, this house and land 340
 Which, set a-soaring, pulls me, soft as sleep,
 Along life's pleasant meadow, — arm left free
 To lock a friend's in, — whose but yours, old boy?
 Arm in arm glide we over rough and smooth,
 While hand; to pocket held, saves cash from cards.
 Now, if you don't esteem ten thousand pounds
 (— Which I shall probably discover snug
 Hid somewhere in the column-corner capped
 With '*Credit*,' based on '*Balance*,' — which, I swear,
 By this time next month I shall quite forget 350
 Whether I lost or won — ten thousand pounds,
 Which at this instant I would give . . . let's see,
 For Galopin — nay, for that Gainsborough
 Sir Richard won't sell, and, if bought by me,
 Would get my glance and praise some twice a
 year, —)
 Well, if you don't esteem that price dirt-cheap
 For teaching me Dalmatia was mistake —
 Why then, my last illusion-bubble breaks,
 My one discovered phoenix proves a goose,
 My cleverest of all companions — oh, 360
 Was worth nor ten pence nor ten thousand pounds!
 Come! Be yourself again! So endeth here
 The morning's lesson! Never while life lasts

Do I touch card again. To breakfast now!
 To bed — I can't say, since you needs must start
 For station early — oh, the down-train still,
 First plan and best plan — townward trip behanged!
 You 're due at your big brother's — pay that debt,
 Then owe me not a farthing! Order eggs —
 And who knows but there 's trout obtainable?" 370

The fine man looks well-nigh malignant: then —

"Sir, please subdue your manner! Debts are debts:
 I pay mine — debts of this sort — certainly.
 What do I care how you regard your gains,
 Want them or want them not? The thing *I* want
 Is — not to have a story circulate
 From club to club — how, bent on clearing out
 Young So-and-so, young So-and-so cleaned me,
 Then set the empty kennel flush again,
 Ignored advantage and forgave his friend — 380
 For why? There was no wringing blood from stone!
 Oh, don't be savage! You would hold your tongue,
 Bite it in two, as man may; but those small
 Hours in the smoking-room, when instance apt
 Rises to tongue's root, tingles on to tip,
 And the thinned company consists of six
 Capital well-known fellows one may trust!
 Next week, it's in the 'World.' No, thank you much.
 I owe ten thousand pounds: I'll pay them!"

"Now, —

This becomes funny. You 've made friends with me:
 I can't help knowing of the ways and means! 391
 Or stay! they say your brother closets up
 Correggio's long-lost Leda: if he means
 To give you that, and if you give it me . . . "

“*I polished snob off to aristocrat?*
 You compliment me! father’s apron still
 Sticks out from son’s court-vesture: still silk purse
 Roughs finger with some bristle sow ear-born!
 Well, neither I nor you mean harm at heart!
 I owe you and shall you pay: which premised, 400
 Why should what follows sound like flattery?
 The fact is — you do compliment too much
 Your humble master, as I own I am;
 You owe me no such thanks as you protest.
 The polisher needs precious stone no less
 Than precious stone needs polisher: believe
 I struck no tint from out you but I found
 Snug lying first ’neath surface hair-breadth-deep!
 Beside, I liked the exercise: with skill
 Goes love to show skill for skill’s sake. You see, 410
 I’m old and understand things: too absurd
 It were you pitched and tossed away your life,
 As diamond were Scotch-pebble! all the more,
 That I myself misused a stone of price.
 Born and bred clever — people used to say
 Clever as most men, if not something more —
 Yet here I stand a failure, cut awry
 Or left opaque, — no brilliant named and known.
 Whate’er my inner stuff, my outside’s blank:
 I’m nobody — or rather, look that same — 420
 I’m — who I am — and know it; but I hold
What in my hand out for the world to see?
 What ministry, what mission, or what book
 — I’ll say, book even? Not a sign of these!
 I began — laughing — ‘*All these when I like!*’
 I end with — well, you’ve hit it! — ‘*This boy’s*
cheque
For just as many thousands as he’ll spare!’
 The first — I could, and would not; your spare cash

I would, and could not: have no scruple, pray,
 But, as I hoped to pocket yours, pouch mine 430
 — When you are able!”

“Which is — when to be?

I’ve heard, great characters require a fall
 Of fortune to show greatness by uprise:
They touch the ground to jollily rebound,
 Add to the Album! Let a fellow share
 Your secret of superiority!
 I know, my banker makes the money breed
 Money; I eat and sleep, he simply takes
 The dividends and cuts the coupons off,
 Sells out, buys in, keeps doubling, tripling cash, 440
 While I do nothing but receive and spend.
 But you, spontaneous generator, hatch
 A wind-egg; cluck, and forth struts Capital
 As Interest to me from egg of gold.
 I am grown curious: pay me by all means!
 How will you make the money?”

“Mind your own —

Not my affair. Enough: or money, or
 Money’s worth, as the case may be, expect
 Ere month’s end, — keep but patient for a month!
 Who’s for a stroll to station? Ten’s the time; 450
 Your man, with my things, follow in the trap;
 At stoppage of the down-train, play the arrived
 On platform, and you’ll show the due fatigue
 Of the night-journey, — not much sleep, — perhaps,
 Your thoughts were on before you — yes, indeed,
 You join them, being happily awake
 With thought’s sole object as she smiling sits
 At breakfast-table. I shall dodge meantime
 In and out station-precinct, wile away
 The hour till up my engine pants and smokes. 460

No doubt, she goes to fetch you. Never fear!
She gets no glance at me, who shame such saints!"

II

So, they ring bell, give orders, pay, depart
Amid profuse acknowledgment from host
Who well knows what may bring the younger back.
They light cigar, descend in twenty steps
The "*calm acclivity*," inhale — beyond
Tobacco's balm — the better smoke of turf
And wood fire, — cottages at cookery
I' the morning, — reach the main road straitening
on

'Twixt wood and wood, two black walls full of night
Slow to disperse, though mists thin fast before 10
The advancing foot, and leave the flint-dust fine
Each speck with its fire-sparkle. Presently
The road's end with the sky's beginning mix
In one magnificence of glare, due East,
So high the sun rides, — May 's the merry month.

They slacken pace: the younger stops abrupt,
Discards cigar, looks his friend full in face.

"All right; the station comes in view at end;
Five minutes from the beech-clump, there you are!
I say: let 's halt, let 's borrow yonder gate 20
Of its two magpies, sit and have a talk!
Do let a fellow speak a moment! More
I think about and less I like the thing —
No, you must let me! Now, be good for once!
Ten thousand pounds be done for, dead and damned!
We played for love, not hate: yes, hate! I hate
Thinking you beg or borrow or reduce
To strychnine some poor devil of a lord

Licked at Unlimited Loo. I had the cash 29
 To lose — you knew that! — lose and none the less
 Whistle to-morrow: it's not every chap
 Affords to take his punishment so well!
 Now, don't be angry with a friend whose fault
 Is that he thinks — upon my soul, I do —
 Your head the best head going. Oh, one sees
 Names in the newspaper — great this, great that,
 Gladstone, Carlyle, the Laureate: — much I care!
 Others have their opinion, I keep mine:
 Which means — by right you ought to have the
 things

I want a head for. Here's a pretty place, 40
 My cousin's place, and presently my place,
 Not yours! I'll tell you how it strikes a man.
 My cousin's fond of music and of course
 Plays the piano (it won't be for long!)
 A brand-new bore she calls a '*semi-grand*,
 Rosewood and pearl, that blocks the drawing-room,
 And cost no end of money. Twice a week
 Down comes Herr Somebody and seats himself,
 Sets to work teaching — with his teeth on edge —
 I've watched the rascal. '*Does he play first-rate?*'
 I ask: '*I rather think so,*' answers she — 51
 '*He's What's-his-Name!*' — '*Why give you lessons*
then?' —

'*I pay three guineas and the train beside.*' —
 '*This instrument, has he one such at home?*' —
 '*He? Has to practise on a table-top,*
When he can't hire the proper thing.' — '*I see!*
You've the piano, he the skill, and God
The distribution of such gifts.' So here:
 After your teaching, I shall sit and strum
 Polkas on this piano of a Place
 You'd make resound with *Rule Britannia!*"

“Thanks!

I don't say but this pretty cousin's place,
Appendaged with your million, tempts my hand
As key-board I might touch with some effect.”

“Then, why not have obtained the like? House,
land,

Money, are things obtainable, you see,
By clever head-work: ask my father else!
You, who teach me, why not have learned, yourself?
Played like Herr Somebody with power to thump
And flourish and the rest, not bend demure 70

Pointing out blunders — ‘*Sharp, not natural!*
Permit me — on the black key use the thumb!’

There's some fatality, I'm sure! You say
‘*Marry the cousin, that's your proper move!*’
And I do use the thumb, and hit the sharp:
You should have listened to your own head's hint,
As I to you! The puzzle's past my power,
How you have managed — with such stuff, such
means —

Not to be rich nor great nor happy man:
Of which three good things where's a sign at all? 80
Just look at Dizzy! Come, — what tripped your
heels?

Instruct a goose that boasts wings and can't fly!
I wager I have guessed it! — never found
The old solution of the riddle fail!
‘*Who was the woman?*’ I don't ask, but — ‘*Where*
I the path of life stood she who tripped you?’”

“Goose

You truly are! I own to fifty years.
Why don't I interpose and cut out — you?
Compete with five-and-twenty? Age, my boy!”

“Old man, no nonsense! — even to a boy
That’s ripe at least for rationality
Rapped into him, as may be mine was, once!
I’ve had my small adventure lesson me
Over the knuckles! — likely, I forget
The sort of figure youth cuts now and then,
Competing with old shoulders but young head
Despite the fifty grizzling years!”

“Aha?”

Then that means — just the bullet in the blade
Which brought Dalmatia on the brain, — that, too,
Came of a fatal creature? Can't pretend
Now for the first time to surmise as much!
Make a clean breast! Recount! a secret's safe
'Twixt you, me and the gate-post!"

“ — Can’t pretend,

Neither, to never have surmised your wish!
It's no use, — case of unextracted ball —
Winces at finger-touching. Let things be!"

“Ah, if you love your love still! I hate mine.”

“I can’t hate.”

“I won’t teach you; and won’t tell
 You, therefore, what you please to ask of me:
 As if I, also, may not have my ache!” 110

“My sort of ache? No, no! and yet — perhaps!
All comes of thinking you superior still.
But live and learn! I say! Time’s up! Good
jump!

You old, indeed! I fancy there's a cut
Across the wood, a grass path: shall we try?
It's venturesome, however!"

"Stop, my boy!
 Don't think I'm stingy of experience! Life
 — It's like this wood we leave. Should you and I
 Go wandering about there, though the gaps
 We went in and came out by were opposed 120
 As the two poles, still, somehow, all the same,
 By nightfall we should probably have chanced
 On much the same main points of interest —
 Both of us measured girth of mossy trunk,
 Stript ivy from its strangled prey, clapped hands
 At squirrel, sent a fir-cone after crow,
 And so forth, — never mind what time betwixt.
 So in our lives; allow I entered mine
 Another way than you: 't is possible
 I ended just by knocking head against 130
 That plaguy low-hung branch yourself began
 By getting bump from; as at last you too
 May stumble o'er that stump which first of all
 Bade me walk circumspectly. Head and feet
 Are vulnerable both, and I, foot-sure,
 Forgot that ducking down saves brow from bruise.
 I, early old, played young man four years since
 And failed confoundedly: so, hate alike
 Failure and who caused failure, — curse her cant!"

"Oh, I see! You, though somewhat past the prime,
 Were taken with a rosebud beauty! Ah — 141
 But how should chits distinguish? She admired
 Your marvel of a mind, I'll undertake!
 But as to body . . . nay, I mean . . . that is,
 When years have told on face and figure . . . "

"Thanks,

Mister *Sufficiently-Instructed!* Such
 No doubt was bound to be the consequence

To suit your self-complacency: she liked
My head enough, but loved some heart beneath
Some head with plenty of brown hair a-top 150
After my young friend's fashion! What becomes
Of that fine speech you made a minute since
About the man of middle age you found
A formidable peer at twenty-one?
So much for your mock-modesty! and yet
I back your first against this second sprout
Of observation, insight, what you please.
My middle age, Sir, had too much success!
It's odd: my case occurred four years ago —
I finished just while you commenced that turn 160
I' the wood of life that takes us to the wealth
Of honeysuckle, heaped for who can reach.
Now, I don't boast: it's bad style, and beside,
The feat proves easier than it looks: I plucked
Full many a flower unnamed in that bouquet
(Mostly of peonies and poppies, though!)
Good nature sticks into my button-hole.
Therefore it was with nose in want of snuff
Rather than Ess or Psidium, that I chanced 169
On what — so far from '*rosebud beauty*' . . . Well —
She's dead: at least you never heard her name:
She was no courtly creature, had nor birth
Nor breeding — mere fine-lady-breeding; but
Oh, such a wonder of a woman! Grand
As a Greek statue! Stick fine clothes on that,
Style that a Duchess or a Queen, — you know,
Artists would make an outcry: all the more,
That she had just a statue's sleepy grace
Which broods o'er its own beauty. Nay, her fault
(Don't laugh!) was just perfection: for suppose 180
Only the little flaw, and I had peeped
Inside it, learned what soul inside was like.

Would break bounds to contest my prize with me
 The first discoverer, should she but emerge
 From that safe den of darkness where she dozed
 Till I stole in, that country-parsonage
 Where, country-parson's daughter, motherless, 220
 Brotherless, sisterless, for eighteen years
 She had been vegetating lily-like.
 Her father was my brother's tutor, got
 The living that way: him I chanced to see —
 Her I saw — her the world would grow one eye
 To see, I felt no sort of doubt at all!
 'Secure her!' cried the devil: 'afterward
 Arrange for the disposal of the prize!' 229
 The devil's doing! yet I seem to think —
 Now, when all's done, — think with '*a head reposed*'
 In French phrase — hope I think I meant to do
 All requisite for such a rarity
 When I should be at leisure, have due time
 To learn requirement. But in evil day —
 Bless me, at week's end, long as any year,
 The father must begin '*Young Somebody,*
Much recommended — for I break a rule —
Comes here to read, next Long Vacation.' '*Young!*'
 That did it. Had the epithet been '*rich,*'
 '*Noble,*' '*a genius,*' even '*handsome,*' — but
 — '*Young!*' 240

"I say — just a word! I want to know —
 You are not married?"

"I?"

"Nor ever were?"

"Never! Why?"

"Oh, then — never mind! Go on!
 I had a reason for the question."

“Come, —
You could not be the young man?”

“No, indeed!
Certainly — if you never married her!”

“That I did not: and there ’s the curse, you ’ll see!
Nay, all of it ’s one curse, my life’s mistake
Which, nourished with manure that ’s warranted
To make the plant bear wisdom, blew out full 250
In folly beyond field-flower-foolishness!

The lies I used to tell my womankind,
Knowing they disbelieved me all the time
Though they required my lies, their decent due,
This woman — not so much believed, I ’ll say,
As just anticipated from my mouth:

Since being true, devoted, constant — she
Found constancy, devotion, truth, the plain
And easy commonplace of character.

No mock-heroics but seemed natural 260
To her who underneath the face, I knew
Was fairness’ self, possessed a heart, I judged
Must correspond in folly just as far
Beyond the common, — and a mind to match, —
Not made to puzzle conjurers like me
Who, therein, proved the fool who fronts you, Sir,
And begs leave to cut short the ugly rest!

‘*Trust me!*’ I said: she trusted. ‘*Marry me!*’
Or rather, ‘*We are married: when, the rite?*’ 269

That brought on the collector’s next-day qualm
At counting acquisition’s cost. There lay
My marvel, there my purse more light by much
Because of its late lie-expenditure:

Ill-judged such moment to make fresh demand —
To cage as well as catch my rarity!
So, I began explaining. At first word

Outbroke the horror. *'Then, my truths were lies!'*
 I tell you, such an outbreak, such new strange
 All-unsuspected revelation — soul
 As supernaturally grand as face 280
 Was fair beyond example — that at once
 Either I lost — or, if it please you, found
 My senses, — stammered somehow — *'Jest! and now,
 Earnest! Forget all else but — heart has loved,
 Does love, shall love you ever! take the hand!'*
 Not she! no marriage for superb disdain,
 Contempt incarnate!"

"Yes, it 's different, —
 It 's only like in being four years since.
 I see now!"

"Well, what did disdain do next,
 Think you?"

"That 's past me: did not marry you! —
 That 's the main thing I care for, I suppose. 291
 Turned nun, or what?"

"Why, married in a month
 Some parson, some smug crop-haired smooth-
 chinned sort
 Of curate-creature, I suspect, — dived down,
 Down, deeper still, and came up somewhere else —
 I don't know where — I've not tried much to know, —
 In short, she 's happy: what the clodpoles call
 'Countrified' with a vengeance! leads the life
 Respectable and all that drives you mad; 299
 Still — where, I don't know, and that 's best for both.

"Well, that she did not like you, I conceive.
 But why should you hate her, I want to know?"

"My good young friend, — because of her or else
 Malicious Providence I have to hate.
 For, what I tell you proved the turning-point
 Of my whole life and fortune toward success
 Or failure. If I drown, I lay the fault
 Much on myself who caught at reed not rope,
 But more on reed which, with a packthread's pith,
 Had buoyed me till the minute's cramp could thaw
 And I strike out afresh and so be saved. 311
 It's easy saying — I had sunk before,
 Disqualified myself by idle days
 And busy nights, long since, from holding hard
 On cable, even, had fate cast me such!
 You boys don't know how many times men fail
 Perforce o' the little to succeed i' the large,
 Husband their strength, let slip the petty prey,
 Collect the whole power for the final pounce.
 My fault was the mistaking man's main prize 320
 For intermediate boy's diversion; clap
 Of boyish hands here frightened game away
 Which, once gone, goes forever. Oh, at first
 I took the anger easily, nor much
 Minded the anguish — having learned that storms
 Subside, and teapot-tempests are akin.
 Time would arrange things, mend whate'er might be
 Somewhat amiss; precipitation, eh?
 Reason and rhyme prompt — reparation! Tiffs
 End properly in marriage and a dance! 330
 I said, "We'll marry, make the past a blank" —
 And never was such damnable mistake!
 That interview, that laying bare my soul,
 As it was first, so was it last chance — one
 And only. Did I write? Back letter came
 Unopened as it went. Inexorable
 She fled, I don't know where, consoled herself

With the smug curate-creature: chop and change!
Sure am I, when she told her shaveling all
His Magdalen's adventure, tears were shed, 340
Forgiveness evangelically shown,
'Loose hair and lifted eye,' — as some one says.
And now, he 's worshipped for his pains, the sneak!"

"Well, but your turning-point of life, — what 's here
To hinder you contesting Finsbury
With Orton, next election? I don't see . . ."

"Not you! But *I* see. Slowly, surely, creeps
Day by day o'er me the conviction — here
Was life's prize grasped at, gained, and then let go!
— That with her — may be, for her — I had felt 350
Ice in me melt, grow steam, drive to effect
Any or all the fancies sluggish here
I' the head that needs the hand she would not take
And I shall never lift now. Lo, your wood —
Its turnings which I likened life to! Well, —
There she stands, ending every avenue,
Her visionary presence on each goal
I might have gained had we kept side by side!
Still string nerve and strike foot? Her frown forbids:
The steam congeals once more: I'm old again! 360
Therefore I hate myself — but how much worse
Do not I hate who would not understand,
Let me repair things — no, but sent a-slide
My folly falteringly, stumblingly
Down, down and deeper down until I drop
Upon — the need of your ten thousand pounds
And consequently loss of mine! I lose
Character, cash, nay, common-sense itself
Recounting such a lengthy cock-and-bull
Adventure — lose my temper in the act . . ."

“And lose beside, — if I may supplement
 The list of losses, — train and ten-o’clock!
 Hark, pant and puff, there travels the swart
 sign!

So much the better! You’re my captive now!
 I’m glad you trust a fellow: friends grow thick
 This way — that’s twice said; we were thickish,
 though,

Even last night, and, ere night comes again,
 I prophesy good luck to both of us!

For see now! — back to ‘*balmy eminence*’

Or ‘*calm acclivity*,’ or what’s the word!

380

Bestow you there an hour, concoct at ease

A sonnet for the Album, while I put

Bold face on, best foot forward, make for house,

March in to aunt and niece, and tell the truth —

(Even white-lying goes against my taste

After your little story). Oh, the niece

Is rationality itself! The aunt —

If she’s amenable to reason too —

Why, you stopped short to pay her due respect, 389

And let the Duke wait (I’ll work well the Duke).

If she grows gracious, I return for you;

If thunder’s in the air, why — bear your doom,

Dine on rump-steaks and port, and shake the dust

Of aunty from your shoes as off you go

By evening-train, nor give the thing a thought

How you shall pay me — that’s as sure as fate,

Old fellow! Off with you, face left about!

Yonder’s the path I have to pad. You see,

I’m in good spirits, God knows why! Perhaps

Because the woman did not marry you

400

— Who look so hard at me, — and have the
 right,

One must be fair and own.”

The two stand still

Under an oak.

“Look here!” resumes the youth.

“I never quite knew how I came to like
You — so much — whom I ought not court at all:
Nor how you had a leaning just to me
Who am assuredly not worth your pains.
For there must needs be plenty such as you
Somewhere about, — although I can’t say where, —
Able and willing to teach all you know; 410

While — how can you have missed a score like me
With money and no wit, precisely each
A pupil for your purpose, were it — ease
Fool’s poke of tutor’s *honorarium*-fee?

And yet, howe’er it came about, I felt
At once my master: you as prompt descried
Your man, I warrant, so was bargain struck.
Now, these same lines of liking, loving, run
Sometimes so close together they converge — 419
Life’s great adventures — you know what I mean —
In people. Do you know, as you advanced,
It got to be uncommonly like fact

We two had fallen in with — liked and loved
Just the same woman in our different ways?
I began life — poor groundling as I prove —
Winged and ambitious to fly high: why not?
There’s something in ‘Don Quixote’ to the point,
My shrewd old father used to quote and praise —
‘*Am I born man?*’ asks Sancho: ‘*being man,*
By possibility I may be Pope!’ 430

So, Pope I meant to make myself, by step
And step, whereof the first should be to find
A perfect woman; and I tell you this —
If what I fixed on, in the order due

Of undertakings, as next step, had first
Of all disposed itself to suit my tread,
And I had been, the day I came of age,
Returned at head of poll for Westminster
— Nay, and moreover summoned by the Queen 439
At week's end, when my maiden-speech bore fruit,
To form and head a Tory ministry —
It would not have seemed stranger, no, nor been
More strange to me, as now I estimate,
Than what did happen — sober truth, no dream.
I saw my wonder of a woman, — laugh,
I'm past that! — in Commemoration-week.
A plenty have I seen since, fair and foul, —
With eyes, too, helped by your sagacious wink;
But one to match that marvel — no least trace,
Least touch of kinship and community! 450
The end was — I did somehow state the fact,
Did, with no matter what imperfect words,
One way or other give to understand
That woman, soul and body were her slave
Would she but take, but try them — any test
Of will, and some poor test of power beside:
So did the strings within my brain grow tense
And capable of . . . hang similitudes!
She answered kindly but beyond appeal.
'No sort of hope for me, who came too late. 460
*She was another's. Love went — mine to her,
Hers just as loyally to some one else.'*
Of course! I might expect it! Nature's law —
Given the peerless woman, certainly
Somewhere shall be the peerless man to match!
I acquiesced at once, submitted me
In something of a stupor, went my way.
I fancy there had been some talk before
Of somebody — her father or the like —

To coach me in the holidays, — that 's how 470
 I came to get the sight and speech of her, —
 But I had sense enough to break off sharp,
 Save both of us the pain."

"Quite right there!"

"Eh?

Quite wrong, it happens! Now comes worst of all!
 Yes, I did sulk aloof and let alone
 The lovers — *I* disturb the angel-mates?"

"Seraph paired off with cherub!"

"Thank you! While
 I never plucked up courage to inquire
 Who he was, even, — certain-sure of this,
 That nobody I knew of had blue wings 480
 And wore a star-crown as he needs must do, —
 Some little lady, — plainish, pock-marked girl, —
 Finds out my secret in my woful face,
 Comes up to me at the Apollo Ball,
 And pityingly pours her wine and oil
 This way into the wound: '*Dear f-f-friend,*
Why waste affection thus on — must I say,
A somewhat worthless object? Who's her choice —
Irrevocable as deliberate —
Out of the wide world? I shall name no names — 490
But there's a person in society,
Who, blessed with rank and talent, has grown gray
In idleness and sin of every sort
Except hypocrisy: he's thrice her age,
A by-word for "successes with the sex"
As the French say — and, as we ought to say,
Consummately a liar and a rogue,
Since — show we where's the woman won without
The help of this one lie which she believes —

*That — never mind how things have come to pass, 500
 And let who loves have loved a thousand times —
 All the same he now loves her only, loves
 Her ever! if by “won” you just mean “sold,”
 That’s quite another compact. Well, this scamp,
 Continuing descent from bad to worse,
 Must leave his fine and fashionable prey
 (Who — fathered, brothered, husbanded, — are hedged
 About with thorny danger) and apply
 His arts to this poor country ignorance
 Who sees forthwith in the first rag of man 510
 Her model hero! Why continue waste
 On such a woman treasures of a heart
 Would yet find solace, — yes, my f-f-friend —
 In some congenial — fiddle-diddle-dee?’”*

“Pray, is the pleasant gentleman described
 Exact the portrait which my ‘f-f-friends’
 Recognize as so like? ’Tis evident
 You half surmised the sweet original
 Could be no other than myself, just now! 519
 Your stop and start were flattering!”

“Of course

Caricature’s allowed for in a sketch!
 The longish nose becomes a foot in length,
 The swarthy cheek gets copper-colored, — still,
 Prominent beak and dark-hued skin are facts:
 And ‘parson’s daughter’ — ‘young man coachable’ —
 ‘Elderly party’ — ‘four years since’ — were facts
 To fasten on, a moment! Marriage, though —
 That made the difference, I hope.”

“All right!

I never married; wish I had — and then
 Unwish it: people kill their wives, sometimes! 530

I hate my mistress, but I 'm murder-free.
 In your case, where 's the grievance? You camelast,
 The earlier bird picked up the worm. Suppose
 You, in the glory of your twenty-one,
 Had happened to precede myself! 't is odds
 But this gigantic juvenility,
 This offering of a big arm's bony hand —
 I'd rather shake than feel shake me, I know —
 Had moved *my* dainty mistress to admire
 An altogether new Ideal — deem 540
 Idolatry less due to life's decline
 Productive of experience, powers mature
 By dint of usage, the made man — no boy
 That 's all to make! I was the earlier bird —
 And what I found, I let fall: what you missed
 Who is the fool that blames you for?"

“Myself —

For nothing, everything! For finding out
 She, whom I worshipped, was a worshipper
 In turn of . . . but why stir up settled mud?
 She married him — the fifty-years-old rake — 550
 How you have teased the talk from me! At last
 My secret 's told you. I inquired no more,
 Nay, stopped ears when informants unshut mouth;
 Enough that she and he live, deuce take where,
 Married and happy, or else miserable —
 It 's 'Cut-the-pack;' she turned up ace or knave,
 And I left Oxford, England, dug my hole
 Out in Dalmatia, till you drew me thence
 Badger-like, — '*Back to London*' was the word —
 '*Do things, a many, there, you fancy hard,* 560
I'll undertake are easy!' — the advice.
 I took it, had my twelvemonth's fling with you —
 (Little hand holding large hand pretty tight

For all its delicacy — eh, my lord?),
 Until when, t' other day, I got a turn
 Somehow and gave up tired: and '*Rest!*' bade you,
 '*Marry your cousin, double your estate,*
And take your ease by all means!' So, I loll
 On this the springy sofa, mine next month — 569
 Or should loll, but that you must needs beat rough
 The very down you spread me out so smooth.
 I wish this confidence were still to make!
 Ten thousand pounds? You owe me twice the sum
 For stirring up the black depths! There's repose
 Or, at least, silence when misfortune seems
 All that one has to bear; but folly — yes,
 Folly, it all was! Fool to be so meek,
 So humble, — such a coward rather say!
 Fool, to adore the adorer of a fool!
 Not to have faced him, tried (a useful hint) 580
 My big and bony, here, against the bunch
 Of lily-colored five with signet-ring,
 Most like, for little-finger's sole defence —
 Much as you flaunt the blazon there! I grind
 My teeth, that bite my very heart, to think —
 To know I might have made that woman mine
 But for the folly of the coward — know —
 Or what's the good of my apprenticeship
 This twelvemonth to a master in the art? 589
 Mine—had she been mine—just one moment mine
 For honor, for dishonor, — anyhow,
 So that my life, instead of stagnant . . . Well,
 You've poked and proved stagnation is not sleep —
 Hang you!"

"Hang *you* for an ungrateful goose!
 All this means — I who since I knew you first
 Have helped you to conceit yourself this cock

O' the dunghill with all hens to pick and choose —
 Ought to have helped you when shell first was chipped
 By chick that wanted prompting '*Use the spur!*'
 While I was elsewhere putting mine to use. 600
 As well might I blame you who kept aloof,
 Seeing you could not guess I was alive,
 Never advised me '*Do as I have done —*
Reverence such a jewel as your luck
Has scratched up to enrich unworthiness!'
 As your behavior was should mine have been,
 — Faults which we both, too late, are sorry for:
 Opposite ages, each with its mistake!
 '*If youth but would — if age but could,*' you know.
 Don't let us quarrel. Come, we're — young and
 old — 610

Neither so badly off. Go you your way,
 Cut to the Cousin! I'll to Inn, await
 The issue of diplomacy with Aunt,
 And wait my hour on '*calm acclivity*'
 In rumination manifold, — perhaps
 About ten thousand pounds I have to pay!"

III

Now, as the elder lights the fresh cigar
 Conducive to resource, and saunteringly
 Betakes him to the left-hand backward path, —
 While, much sedate, the younger strides away
 To right and makes for — islanded in lawn
 And edged with shrubbery — the brilliant bit
 Of Barry's building that's the Place, — a pair
 Of women, at this nick of time, one young,
 One very young, are ushered with due pomp
 Into the same Inn-parlor — '*disengaged*' 10
Entirely now!" the obsequious landlord smiles,
 "*Since the late occupants — whereof but one*

Was quite a stranger" — (smile enforced by bow)
"Left, full two hours since, to catch the train,
Probably for the stranger's sake!" (Bow, smile,
 And backing out from door soft-closed behind.)

Woman and girl, the two, alone inside,
 Begin their talk: the girl, with sparkling eyes —
 "Oh, I forewent him purposely! but you, 19
 Who joined at — journeyed from the Junction here —
 I wonder how he failed your notice. Few
 Stop at our station: fellow-passengers
 Assuredly you were — I saw indeed
 His servant, therefore he arrived all right.
 I wanted, you know why, to have you safe
 Inside here first of all, so dodged about
 The dark end of the platform; that's his way —
 To swing from station straight to avenue
 And stride the half a mile for exercise.
 I fancied you might notice the huge boy. 30
 He soon gets o'er the distance; at the house
 He'll hear I went to meet him and have missed;
 He'll wait. No minute of the hour's too much
 Meantime for our preliminary talk:
 First word of which must be — O good beyond
 Expression of all goodness — you to come!"

The elder, the superb one, answers slow.

"There was no helping that. You called for me,
 Cried, rather: and my old heart answered you.
 Still, thank me! since the effort breaks a vow — 40
 At least, a promise to myself."

"I know!

How selfish get you happy folk to be!
 If I should love my husband, must I needs

Sacrifice straightway all the world to him,
 As you do? Must I never dare leave house
 On this dread Arctic expedition, out
 And in again, six mortal hours, though you,
 You even, my own friend for evermore,
 Adjure me — fast your friend till rude love pushed
 Poor friendship from her vantage — just to grant 50
 The quarter of a whole day's company
 And counsel? This makes counsel so much more
 Need and necessity. For here 's my block
 Of stumbling: in the face of happiness
 So absolute, fear chills me. If such change
 In heart be but love's easy consequence,
 Do I love? If to marry mean — let go
 All I now live for, should my marriage be?"

The other never once has ceased to gaze
 On the great elm-tree in the open, posed 60
 Placidly full in front, smooth bole, broad branch,
 And leafage, one green plenitude of May.
 The gathered thought runs into speech at last.

"O you exceeding beauty, bosomful
 Of lights and shades, murmurs and silences,
 Sun-warmth, dew-coolness, — squirrel, bee and bird,
 High, higher, highest, till the blue proclaims
*'Leave earth, there's nothing better till next step
 Heavenward!'* — so, off flies what has wings to help!"

And henceforth they alternate. Says the girl — 70

"That's saved then: marriage spares the early
 taste."

"Four years now, since my eye took note of tree!"

“If I had seen no other tree but this
My life long, while yourself came straight, you
said,

From tree which overstretched you and was just
One fairy tent with pitcher-leaves that held
Wine, and a flowery wealth of suns and moons,
And magic fruits whereon the angels feed —
I looking out of window on a tree 79
Like yonder — otherwise well-known, much-liked,
Yet just an English ordinary elm —
What marvel if you cured me of conceit
My elm’s bird-bee-and-squirrel tenantry
Was quite the proud possession I supposed?
And there is evidence you tell me true.
The fairy marriage-tree reports itself
Good guardian of the perfect face and form,
Fruits of four years’ protection! Married friend,
You are more beautiful than ever!”

“Yes:

I think that likely. I could well dispense 90
With all thought fair in feature, mine or no,
Leave but enough of face to know me by —
With all found fresh in youth except such strength
As lets a life-long labor earn repose
Death sells at just that price, they say; and so,
Possibly, what I care not for, I keep.”

“How you must know he loves you! Chill, before,
Fear sinks to freezing. Could I sacrifice —
Assured my lover simply loves my soul —
One nose-breadth of fair feature? No, indeed! 100
Your own love . . .”

“The preliminary hour —
Don’t waste it!”

“But I can’t begin at once!
The angel’s self that comes to hear me speak
Drives away all the care about the speech.
What an angelic mystery you are —
Now — that is certain! when I knew you first,
No break of halo and no bud of wing!
I thought I knew you, saw you, round and through,
Like a glass ball; suddenly, four years since,
You vanished, how and whither? Mystery! 110
Wherefore? No mystery at all: you loved,
Were loved again, and left the world of course:
Who would not? Lapped four years in fairyland,
Out comes, by no less wonderful a chance,
The changeling, touched athwart her trellised
bliss

Of blush-rose bower by just the old friend’s voice
That’s now struck dumb at her own potency.
I talk of my small fortunes? Tell me yours
Rather! The fool I ever was — I am,
You see that: the true friend you ever had, 120
You have, you also recognize. Perhaps,
Giving you all the love of all my heart,
Nature, that’s niggard in me, has denied
The after-birth of love there’s some one claims
— This huge boy, swinging up the avenue;
And I want counsel: is defect in me,
Or him who has no right to raise the love?
My cousin asks my hand: he’s young enough,
Handsome, — my maid thinks, — manly’s more
the word:
He asked my leave to ‘drop’ the elm-tree there, 130
Some morning before breakfast. Gentleness
Goes with the strength, of course. He’s honest
too,
Limpidly truthful. For ability —

All 's in the rough yet. His first taste of life
 Seems to have somehow gone against the tongue:
 He travelled, tried things — came back, tried still
 more —

He says he 's sick of all. He 's fond of me
 After a certain careless-earnest way
 I like: the iron 's crude, — no polished steel
 Somebody forged before me. I am rich — 140
 That 's not the reason, he 's far richer: no,
 Nor is it that he thinks me pretty, — frank
 Undoubtedly on that point! He saw once
 The pink of face-perfection — oh, not you —
 Content yourself, my beauty! — for she proved
 So thoroughly a cheat, his charmer . . . nay,
 He runs into extremes, I 'll say at once,
 Lest you say! Well, I understand he wants
 Some one to serve, something to do: and both
 Requisites so abound in me and mine 150
 That here 's the obstacle which stops consent:
 The smoothness is too smooth, and I mistrust
 The unseen cat beneath the counterpane.
 Therefore I thought '*Would she but judge for me,
 Who, judging for herself succeeded so!*'
 Do I love him, does he love me, do both
 Mistake for knowledge — easy ignorance?
 Appeal to its proficient in each art!
 I got rough-smoothed through a piano-piece,
 Rattled away last week till tutor came, 160
 Heard me to end, then grunted '*Ach, mein Gott!
 Sagen Sie "easy"?* Every note is wrong.
*All thumped mit wrist: we 'll trouble fingers now.
 The Fräulein will please roll up Raff again
 And exercise at Czerny for one month!*'
 Am I to roll up cousin, exercise
 At Trollope's novels for one month? Pronounce!"

"Now, place each in the right position first,
 Adviser and advised one! I perhaps
 Am three — nay, four years older; am, beside, 170
 A wife: advantages — to balance which,
 You have a full fresh joyous sense of life
 That finds you out life's fit food everywhere,
 Detects enjoyment where I, slow and dull,
 Fumble at fault. Already, these four years,
 Your merest glimpses at the world without
 Have shown you more than ever met my gaze;
 And now, by joyance you inspire joy, — learn
 While you profess to teach, and teach, although
 Avowedly a learner. I am dazed 180
 Like any owl by sunshine which just sets
 The sparrow preening plumage! Here's to spy
 — Your cousin! You have scanned him all your life,
 Little or much; I never saw his face.
 You have determined on a marriage — used
 Deliberation therefore — I'll believe
 No otherwise, with opportunity
 For judgment so abounding! Here stand I —
 Summoned to give my sentence, for a whim, 189
 (Well, at first cloud-fleck thrown athwart your blue)
 Judge what is strangeness' self to me, — say '*Wed!*'
 Or '*Wed not!*' whom you promise I shall judge
 Presently, at propitious lunch-time, just
 While he carves chicken! Sends he leg for wing?
 That revelation into character
 And conduct must suffice me! Quite as well
 Consult with yonder solitary crow
 That eyes us from your elm-top!"

"Still the same!

Do you remember, at the library
 We saw together somewhere, those two books 200

Somebody said were noteworthy? One
Lay wide on table, sprawled its painted leaves
For all the world's inspection; shut on shelf
Reclined the other volume, closed, clasped, locked —
Clear to be let alone. Which page had we
Preferred the turning over of? You were,
Are, ever will be the locked lady, hold
Inside you secrets written, — soul-absorbed,
My ink upon your blotting-paper. I —
What trace of you have I to show in turn? 210
Delicate secrets! No one juvenile
Ever essayed at croquet and performed
Superiorly but I confided you
The sort of hat he wore and hair it held.
While you? One day a calm note comes by post:
'I am just married, you may like to hear.'
Most men would hate you, or they ought; we love
What we fear, — I do! *'Cold'* I shall expect
My cousin calls you. I — dislike not him,
But (if I comprehend what loving means) 220
Love you immeasurably more — more — more
Than even he who, loving you his wife,
Would turn up nose at who impertinent,
Frivolous, forward — *loves* that excellence
Of all the earth he bows in worship to!
And who's this paragon of privilege?
Simply a country parson: his the charm
That worked the miracle! Oh, too absurd
But that you stand before me as you stand!
Such beauty does prove something, everything! 230
Beauty's the prize-flower which dispenses eye
From peering into what has nourished root —
Dew or manure: the plant best knows its place.
Enough, from teaching youth and tending age
And hearing sermons, — haply writing tracts, —

From such strange-love-besprinkled compost, lo,
 Out blows this triumph! Therefore love 's the soil
 Plants find or fail of. You, with wit to find,
 Exercise wit on the old friend's behalf,
 Keep me from failure! Scan and scrutinize 240
 This cousin! Surely he 's as worth your pains
 To study as my elm-tree, crow and all,
 You still keep staring at. I read your thoughts."

"At last?"

"At first! 'Would, tree, a-top of thee
I winged were, like crow perched moveless there,
And so could straightway soar, escape this bore,
Back to my nest where broods whom I love best —
The parson o'er his parish — garish — rarish —
 Oh I could bring the rhyme in if I tried:
 The Album here inspires me! Quite apart 250
 From lyrical expression, have I read
 The stare aright, and sings not soul just so?"
 "Or rather so? 'Cool comfortable elm
That men make coffins out of, — none for me
At thy expense, so thou permit I glide
Under thy ferny feet, and there sleep, sleep,
Nor dread awaking though in heaven itself!'"

The younger looks with face struck sudden white.
 The elder answers its inquiry.

"Dear,
 You are a guesser, not a 'clairvoyante.'
 I'll so far open you the locked and shelved 260
 Volume, my soul, that you desire to see,
 As let you profit by the title-page ——"

"Paradise Lost?"

“*Inferno!* — All which comes
 Of tempting me to break my vow. Stop here!
 Friend, whom I love the best in the whole world,
 Come at your call, be sure that I will do
 All your requirement — see and say my mind.
 It may be that by sad apprenticeship
 I have a keener sense: I’ll task the same. 270
 Only indulge me — here let sight and speech
 Happen — this Inn is neutral ground, you know!
 I cannot visit the old house and home,
 Encounter the old sociality
 Abjured forever. Peril quite enough
 In even this first — last, I pray it prove —
 Renunciation of my solitude!
 Back, you, to house and cousin! Leave me here,
 Who want no entertainment, carry still
 My occupation with me. While I watch 280
 The shadow inching round those ferny feet,
 Tell him ‘*A school-friend wants a word with me*
Up at the inn: time, tide and train won’t wait:
I must go see her — on and off again —
You’ll keep me company?’ Ten minutes’ talk,
 With you in presence, ten more afterward
 With who, alone, convoys me station-bound,
 And I see clearly — and say honestly
 To-morrow: pen shall play tongue’s part, you
 know.

Go — quick! for I have made our hand-in-hand 290
 Return impossible. So scared you look, —
 If cousin does not greet you with ‘*What ghost*
Has crossed your path?’ I set him down obtuse.”

And after one more look, with face still white,
 The younger does go, while the elder stands
 Occupied by the elm at window there.

IV

Occupied by the elm; and, as its shade
Has crept clock-hand-wise till it ticks at fern
Five inches further to the South, the door
Opens abruptly, some one enters sharp,
The elder man returned to wait the youth:
Never observes the room's new occupant,
Throws hat on table, stoops quick, elbow-propped
Over the Album wide there, bends down brow
A cogitative minute, whistles shrill,
Then, — with a cheery-hopeless laugh-and-lose 10
Air of defiance to fate visibly
Casting the toils about him, — mouths once more
“*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*”
Then clasps-to cover, sends book spinning off
T' other side table, looks up, starts erect
Full-face with her who, — roused from that abstruse
Question, “*Will next tick tip the fern or no?*”, —
Fronts him as fully.

All her languor breaks,
Away withers at once the weariness
From the black-blooded brow, anger and hate 20
Convulse. Speech follows slower, but at last —

“You here! I felt, I knew it would befall!
Knew, by some subtle undividable
Trick of the trickster, I should, silly-sooth,
Late or soon, somehow be allured to leave
Safe hiding and come take of him arrears,
My torment due on four years' respite! Time
To pluck the bird's healed breast of down o'er wound
Have your success! Be satisfied this sole
Seeing you has undone all heaven could do 30

These four years, puts me back to you and hell!
 What will next trick be, next success? No doubt
 When I shall think to glide into the grave,
 There will you wait disguised as beckoning Death,
 And catch and capture me for evermore!
 But, God, though I am nothing, be thou all!
 Contest him for me! Strive, for he is strong!"

Already his surprise dies palely out
 In laugh of acquiescing impotence.
 He neither gasps nor hisses: calm and plain — 40

"I also felt and knew — but otherwise!
 You out of hand and sight and care of me
 These four years, whom I felt, knew, all the while . . .
 Oh, it's no superstition! It's a gift
 O' the gamester that he snuffs the unseen powers
 Which help or harm him. Well I knew what lurked,
 Lay perdue paralyzing me, — drugged, drowsed
 And damnified my soul and body both!
 Down and down, see where you have dragged me to,
 You and your malice! I was, four years since, 50
 — Well, a poor creature! I become a knave.
 I squandered my own pence: I plump my purse
 With other people's pounds. I practised play
 Because I liked it: play turns labor now
 Because there's profit also in the sport.
 I gamed with men of equal age and craft:
 I steal here with a boy as green as grass
 Whom I have tightened hold on slow and sure
 This long while, just to bring about to-day
 When the boy beats me hollow, buries me 60
 In ruin who was sure to beggar him.
 O time indeed I should look up and laugh
 'Surely she closes on me!' Here you stand!"

And stand she does: while volubility,
With him, keeps on the increase, for his tongue
After long locking-up is loosed for once.

“Certain the taunt is happy!” he resumes:
“So, I it was allured you — only I
— I, and none other — to this spectacle —
Your triumph, my despair — you woman-fiend 70
That front me! Well, I have my wish, then! See
The low wide brow oppressed by sweeps of hair
Darker and darker as they coil and swathe
The crowned corpse-wanness whence the eyes burn
black

Not asleep now! not pin-points dwarfed beneath
Either great bridging eyebrow — poor blank beads —
Babies, I’ve pleased to pity in my time:
How they protrude and glow immense with hate!
The long triumphant nose attains — retains
Just the perfection; and there’s scarlet-skein 80
My ancient enemy, her lip and lip,
Sense-free, sense-frighting lips clenched cold and bold
Because of chin, that based resolve beneath!
Then the columnar neck completes the whole
Greek-sculpture-baffling body! Do I see?
Can I observe? You wait next word to come?
Well, wait and want! since no one blight I bid
Consume one least perfection. Each and all,
As they are rightly shocking now to me,
So may they still continue! Value them? 90
Ay, as the vendor knows the money-worth
Of his Greek statute, fools aspire to buy,
And he to see the back of! Let us laugh!
You have absolved me from my sin at least!
You stand stout, strong, in the rude health of hate,
No touch of the tame timid nullity

My cowardice, forsooth, has practised on!
 Ay, while you seemed to hint some fine fifth act
 Of tragedy should freeze blood, end the farce,
 I never doubted all was joke. I kept, 100
 May be, an eye alert on paragraphs,
 Newspaper-notice, — let no inquest slip,
 Accident, disappearance: sound and safe
 Were you, my victim, not of mind to die!
 So, my worst fancy that could spoil the smooth
 Of pillow, and arrest descent of sleep
 Was '*Into what dim hole can she have dived,
 She and her wrongs, her woe that's wearing flesh
 And blood away?*' Whereas, see, sorrow swells!
 Or, fattened, fulsome, have you fed on me, 110
 Sucked out my substance? How much gloss, I pray,
 O'erbloomed those hair-swathes when there crept
 from you

To me that craze, else unaccountable
 Which urged me to contest our county-seat
 With whom but my own brother's nominee?
 Did that mouth's pulp glow ruby from carmine
 While I misused my moment, pushed, — one word, —
 One hair's breadth more of gesture, — idiot-like
 Past passion, floundered on to the grotesque,
 And lost the heiress in a grin? At least, 120
 You made no such mistake! You tickled fish,
 Landed your prize the true artistic way!
 How did the smug young curate rise to tune
 Of '*Friend, a fatal fact divides us. Love
 Suits me no longer. I have suffered shame,
 Betrayal: past is past; the future — yours —
 Shall never be contaminate by mine.*
*I might have spared me this confession, not
 — Oh, never by some hideousest of lies,
 Easy, impenetrable! No! but say,* 130

By just the quiet answer — “I am cold.”
Falsehood avault, each shadow of thee, hence!
Had happier fortune willed . . . but dreams are vain.
Now, leave me — yes, for pity’s sake!’ Aha,
 Who fails to see the curate as his face
 Reddened and whitened, wanted handkerchief
 At wrinkling brow and twinkling eye, until
 Out burst the proper ‘*Angel, whom the fiend*
Has thought to smirch, — thy whiteness, at one wipe
Of holy cambric, shall disgrace the swan! 140
Mine be the task’ . . . and so forth! Fool? not he!
 Cunning in flavors, rather! What but sour
 Suspected makes the sweetness doubly sweet,
 And what stings love from faint to flamboyant
 But the fear-sprinkle? Even horror helps —
 ‘*Love’s flame in me by such recited wrong*
Drenched, quenched, indeed? It burns the fiercelier
thence!’

Why, I have known men never love their wives
 Till somebody — myself, suppose — had ‘*drenched*
And quenched love,’ so the blockheads whined: as if
 The fluid fire that lifts the torpid limb 151
 Were a wrong done to palsy. But I thrilled
 No palsied person: half my age, or less,
 The curate was, I’ll wager: o’er young blood
 Your beauty triumphed! Eh, but — was it *he*?
 Then, it *was* he, I heard of! None beside!
 How frank you were about the audacious boy
 Who fell upon you like a thunderbolt —
 Passion and protestation! He it was
 Reserved *in petto!* Ay, and ‘*rich*’ beside — 160
 ‘*Rich*’ — how supremely did disdain curl nose!
 All that I heard was — ‘*wedded to a priest;*’
 Informants sunk youth, riches and the rest.
 And so my lawless love departed loves,

That loves might come together with a rush!
 Surely this last achievement sucked me dry:
 Indeed, that way my wits went. Mistress-queen,
 Be merciful and let your subject slink
 Into dark safety! He's a beggar, see —
 Do not turn back his ship, Australia-bound, 170
 And bid her land him right amid some crowd
 Of creditors, assembled by your curse!
 Don't cause the very rope to crack (you can!)
 Whereon he spends his last (friend's) sixpence, just
 The moment when he hoped to hang himself!
 Be satisfied you beat him!"

She replies —

"Beat him! I do. To all that you confess
 Of abject failure, I extend belief.
 Your very face confirms it: God is just!
 Let my face — fix your eyes! — in turn confirm 180
 What I shall say. All-abject's but half truth;
 Add to all-abject knave as perfect fool!
 So is it you probed human nature, so
 Prognosticated of me? Lay these words
 To heart then, or where God meant heart should
 lurk!

That moment when you first revealed yourself,
 My simple impulse prompted — end forthwith
 The ruin of a life uprooted thus
 To surely perish! How should such spoiled tree
 Henceforward balk the wind of its worst sport, 190
 Fail to go falling deeper, falling down
 From sin to sin until some depth were reached
 Doomed to the weakest by the wickedest
 Of weak and wicked human kind? But when,
 That self-display made absolute, — behold

A new revelation! — round you pleased to veer,
Propose me what should prompt annul the past,
Make me '*amends by marriage*' — in your phrase,
Incorporate me henceforth, body and soul,
With soul and body which mere brushing past 200
Brought leprosy upon me — '*marry*' these!
Why, then despair broke, re-assurance dawned,
Clear-sighted was I that who hurled contempt
As I — thank God! — at the contemptible,
Was scarce an utter weakling. Rent away
By treason from my rightful pride of place,
I was not destined to the shame below.

A cleft had caught me: I might perish there,
But thence to be dislodged and whirled at last 209
Where the black torrent sweeps the sewage — no!
'*Bare breast be on hard rock,*' laughed out my soul
In gratitude, '*howe'er rock's grip may grind!*
The plain rough wretched holdfast shall suffice
This wreck of me!' The wind, — I broke in bloom
At passage of, — which stripped me bole and
branch,

Twisted me up and tossed me here, — turns back,
And, playful ever, would replant the spoil?
Be satisfied, not one least lead that 's mine
Shall henceforth help wind's sport to exercise!
Rather I give such remnant to the rock 220
Which never dreamed a straw would settle there.
Rock may not thank me, may not feel my breast,
Even: enough that *I* feel, hard and cold,
Its safety my salvation. Safe and saved,
I lived, live. When the tempter shall persuade
His prey to slip down, slide off, trust the wind, —
Now that I know if God or Satan be
Prince of the Power of the Air, — then, then, indeed,
Let my life end and degradation too!"

“Good!” he smiles, “true Lord Byron! ‘*Tree and
rock:*’” 230

‘*Rock*’ — there ’s advancement! He ’s at first a
youth,

Rich, worthless therefore; next he grows a priest:

Youth, riches prove a notable resource,

When to leave me for their possessor gluts

Malice abundantly; and now, last change,

The young rich parson represents a rock

— Bloodstone, no doubt. He ’s Evangelical?

Your Ritualists prefer the Church for spouse!”

She speaks.

“I have a story to relate.

There was a parish-priest, my father knew, 240
Elderly, poor: I used to pity him

Before I learned what woes are pity-worth.

Elderly was grown old now, scanty means

Were straitening fast to poverty, beside

The ailments which await in such a case.

Limited every way, a perfect man

Within the bounds built up and up since birth

Breast-high about him till the outside world

Was blank save o’erhead one blue bit of sky —

Faith: he had faith in dogma, small or great, 250

As in the fact that if he clave his skull

He ’d find a brain there: who proves such a fact

No falsehood by experiment at price

Of soul and body? The one rule of life

Delivered him in childhood was ‘*Obey!*

Labor!’ He had obeyed and labored — tame,

True to the mill-track blinked on from above.

Some scholarship he may have gained in youth:

Gone — dropt or flung behind. Some blossom-flake,

Spring’s boon, descends on every vernal head, 260

I used to think; but January joins
December, as his year had known no May
Trouble its snow-deposit, — cold and old!
I heard it was his will to take a wife,
A helpmate. Duty bade him tend and teach —
How? with experience null, nor sympathy
Abundant, — while himself worked dogma dead,
Who would play ministrant to sickness, age,
Womankind, childhood? These demand a wife. 269
Supply the want, then! theirs the wife; for him —
No coarsest sample of the proper sex
But would have served his purpose equally
With God's own angel, — let but knowledge match
Her coarseness: zeal does only half the work.
I saw this — knew the purblind honest drudge
Was wearing out his simple blameless life,
And wanted help beneath a burthen — borne
To treasure-house or dust-heap, what cared I?
Partner he needed: I proposed myself,
Nor much surprised him — duty was so clear! 280
Gratitude? What for? Gain of Paradise —
Escape, perhaps, from the dire penalty
Of who hides talent in a napkin? No:
His scruple was — should I be strong enough
— In body? since of weakness in the mind,
Weariness in the heart — no fear of these!
He took me as these Arctic voyagers
Take an aspirant to their toil and pain:
Can he endure them? — that's the point, and not
— Will he? Who would not, rather! Whereupon,
I pleaded far more earnestly for leave 291
To give myself away, than you to gain
What you called priceless till you gained the heart
And soul and body! which, as beggars serve
Extorted alms, you straightway spat upon.

Not so my husband, — for I gained my suit,
 And had my value put at once to proof.
 Ask him! These four years I have died away
 In village-life. The village? Ugliness
 At best and filthiness at worst, inside. 300
 Outside, sterility — earth sown with salt
 Or what keeps even grass from growing fresh.
 The life? I teach the poor and learn, myself,
 That commonplace to such stupidity
 Is all-recondite. Being brutalized
 Their true need is brute-language, cheery grunts
 And kindly cluckings, no articulate
 Nonsense that's elsewhere knowledge. Tend the
 sick,
 Sickened myself at pig-perversity, 309
 Cat-craft, dog-snarling, — may be, snapping . . .”

“Brief:

You eat that root of bitterness called Man
 — Raw: I prefer it cooked, with social sauce!
 So, he was not the rich youth after all!
 Well, I mistook. But somewhere needs must be
 The compensation. If not young nor rich . . .”

“You interrupt.”

“Because you've daubed enough
 Bistre for background. Play the artist now,
 Produce your figure well-relieved in front!
 The contrast — do not I anticipate?
 Though neither rich nor young — what then? 'T is
 all 320

Forgotten, all this ignobility,
 In the dear home, the darling word, the smile,
 The something sweeter . . .”

“Yes, you interrupt.

I have my purpose and proceed. Who lives
With beasts assumes beast-nature, look and voice,
And, much more, thought, for beasts think. Self-
ishness

In us met selfishness in them, deserved
Such answer as it gained. My husband, bent
On saving his own soul by saving theirs, —
They, bent on being saved if saving soul 330
Included body's getting bread and cheese
Somehow in life and somehow after death, —
Both parties were alike in the same boat,
One danger, therefore one equality.

Safety induces culture: culture seeks
To institute, extend and multiply
The difference between safe man and man,
Able to live alone now; progress means
What but abandonment of fellowship?
We were in common danger, still stuck close. 340
No new books, — were the old ones mastered yet?
No pictures and no music: these divert
— What from? the staving danger off! You paint
The waterspout above, you set to words
The roaring of the tempest round you? Thanks!
Amusement? Talk at end of the tired day
Of the more tiresome morrow! I transcribed
The page on page of sermon-scrawlings — stopped
Intellect's eye and ear to sense and sound —
Vainly: the sound and sense would penetrate 350
To brain and plague there in despite of me
Maddened to know more moral good were done
Had we two simply sallied forth and preached
I 'the *'Green'* they call their grimy, — I with twang
Of long-disused guitar, — with cut and slash
Of much-misvalued horsewhip he, — to bid

The peaceable come dance, the peace-breaker
Pay in his person! Whereas — Heaven and Hell,
Excite with that, restrain with this! So dealt
His drugs my husband; as he dosed himself, 360
He drenched his cattle: and, for all my part
Was just to dub the mortar, never fear
But drugs, hand pestled at, have poisoned nose!
Heaven he let pass, left wisely undescribed:
As applicable therefore to the sleep
I want, that knows no waking — as to what's
Conceived of as the proper prize to tempt
Souls less world-weary: there, no fault to find!
But Hell he made explicit. After death,
Life: man created new, ingeniously 370
Perfect for a vindictive purpose now
That man, first fashioned in beneficence,
Was proved a failure; intellect at length
Replacing old obtuseness, memory
Made mindful of delinquent's bygone deeds
Now that remorse was vain, which life-long lay
Dormant when lesson might be laid to heart;
New gift of observation up and down
And round man's self, new power to apprehend
Each necessary consequence of act 380
In man for well or ill — things obsolete —
Just granted to supplant the idiocy
Man's only guide while act was yet to choose,
With ill or well momentarily its fruit;
A faculty of immense suffering
Conferred on mind and body, — mind, erewhile
Unvisited by one compunctious dream
During sin's drunken slumber, startled up,
Stung through and through by sin's significance
Now that the holy was abolished — just 390
As body which, alive, broke down beneath

Knowledge, lay helpless in the path to good,
 Failed to accomplish aught legitimate,
 Achieve aught worthy, — which grew old in youth,
 And at its longest fell a cut-down flower, —
 Dying, this too revived by miracle
 To bear no end of burthen now that back
 Supported torture to no use at all,
 And live imperishably potent — since
 Life's potency was impotent to ward 400
 One plague off which made earth a hell before.
 This doctrine, which one healthy view of things,
 One sane sight of the general ordinance —
 Nature, — and its particular object, — man, —
 Which one mere eye-cast at the character
 Of Who made these and gave man sense to boot,
 Had dissipated once and evermore, —
 This doctrine I have dosed our flock withal.
 Why? Because none believed it. *They* desire 409
 Such Heaven and dread such Hell, whom every day
 The alehouse tempts from one, a dog-fight bids
 Defy the other? All the harm is done
 Ourselves — done my poor husband who in youth
 Perhaps read Dickens, done myself who still
 Could play both Bach and Brahms. Such life I
 lead —
 Thanks to you, knave! You learn its quality —
 Thanks to me, fool!"

He eyes her earnestly,

But she continues.

“ — Life which, thanks once more
 To you, arch-knave as exquisitest fool,
 I acquiescingly — I gratefully 420
 Take back again to heart! and hence this speech

Which yesterday had spared you. Four years long
Life — I began to find intolerable,
Only this moment. Ere your entry just,
The leap of heart which answered, spite of me,
A friend's first summons, first provocative,
Authoritative, nay, compulsive call
To quit, though for a single day, my house
Of bondage — made return seem horrible.
I heard again a human lucid laugh 430
All trust, no fear; again saw earth pursue
Its narrow busy way amid small cares,
Smaller contentments, much weeds, some few
flowers, —

Never suspicious of a thunderbolt
Avenging presently each daisy's death.
I recognized the beech-tree, knew the thrush
Repeated his old music-phrase, — all right,
How wrong was I, then! But your entry broke
Illusion, bade me back to bounds at once.
I honestly submit my soul: which sprang 440
At love, and losing love lies signed and sealed
'*Failure*.' No love more? then, no beauty more
Which tends to breed love! Purify my powers,
Effortless till some other world procure
Some other chance of prize! or, if none be, —
Nor second world nor chance, — undesecrate
Die then this aftergrowth of heart, surmised
Where May's precipitation left June blank!
Better have failed in the high aim, as I,
Than vulgarly in the low aim succeed 450
As, God be thanked, I do not! Ugliness
Had I called beauty, falsehood — truth, and you
— My lover! No — this earth's unchanged for me,
By his enchantment whom God made the Prince
O' the Power o' the Air, into a Heaven: there is

Heaven, since there is Heaven's simulation — earth.
I sit possessed in patience; prison-roof
Shall break one day and Heaven beam overhead."

His smile is done with; he speaks bitterly.

"Take my congratulations, and permit 460
I wish myself had proved as teachable!
— Or, no! until you taught me, could I learn
A lesson from experience ne'er till now
Conceded? Please you listen while I show
How thoroughly you estimate my worth
And yours — the immeasurably superior! I
Believed at least in one thing, first to last, —
Your love to me: I was the vile and you
The precious; I abused you, I betrayed,
But doubted — never! Why else go my way 470
Judas-like plodding to this Potter's Field
Where fate now finds me? What has dinned my
ear

And dogged my step? The spectre with the shriek
'*Such she was, such were you, whose punishment
Is just!*' And such she was not, all the while!
She never owned a love to outrage, faith
To pay with falsehood! For, my heart knows this —
Love once and you love always. Why, it's down
Here in the Album: every lover knows
Love may use hate but — turn to hate, itself — 480
Turn even to indifference — no, indeed!
Well, I have been spell-bound, deluded like
The witless negro by the Obeah-man
Who bids him wither: so, his eye grows dim,
His arm slack, arrow misses aim and spear
Goes wandering wide, — and all the woe because
He proved untrue to Fetish, who, he finds,

Was just a feather-phantom! I wronged love,
Am ruined, — and there was no love to wrong!”

“No love? Ah, dead love! I invoke thy ghost 490
To show the murderer where thy heart poured life
At summons of the stroke he doubts was dealt
On pasteboard and pretence! Not love, my love?
I changed for you the very laws of life:
Made you the standard of all right, all fair.
No genius but you could have been, no sage,
No sufferer — which is grandest — for the truth!
My hero — where the heroic only hid
To burst from hiding, brighten earth one day!
Age and decline were man’s maturity; 500
Face, form were nature’s type: more grace, more
strength,

What had they been but just superfluous gauds,
Lawless divergence? I have danced through day
On tiptoe at the music of a word,
Have wondered where was darkness gone as night
Burst out in stars at brilliance of a smile!
Lonely, I placed the chair to help me seat
Your fancied presence; in companionship,
I kept my finger constant to your glove
Glued to my breast; then — where was all the
world? 510

I schemed — not dreamed — how I might die some
death

Should save your finger aching! Who creates
Destroys, he only: I had laughed to scorn
Whatever angel tried to shake my faith
And make you seem unworthy: you yourself
Only could do that! With a touch ’t was done.
‘Give me all, trust me wholly!’ At the word,
I did give, I did trust — and thereupon

The touch did follow. Ah, the quiet smile,
The masterfully-folded arm in arm, 520
As trick obtained its triumph one time more!
In turn, my soul too triumphs in defeat:
Treason like faith moves mountains: love is gone!"

He paces to and fro, stops, stands quite close
And calls her by her name. Then —
"God forgives:

Forgive you, delegate of God, brought near
As never priests could bring him to this soul
That prays you both — forgive me! I abase —
Know myself mad and monstrous utterly
In all I did that moment; but as God 530
Gives me this knowledge — heart to feel and tongue
To testify — so be you gracious too!
Judge no man by the solitary work
Of — well, they do say and I can believe —
The devil in him: his, the moment, — mine
The life — your life!"

He names her name again.

"You were just — merciful as just, you were
In giving me no respite: punishment
Followed offending. Sane and sound once more,
The patient thanks decision, promptitude, 540
Which flung him prone and fastened him from hurt,
Haply to others, surely to himself.
I wake and would not you had spared one pang.
All's well that ends well!"

Yet again her name.

"Had *you* no fault? Why must you change, for-
sooth,

Parts, why reverse positions, spoil the play?
Why did your nobleness look up to me,
Not down on the ignoble thing confessed?
Was it your part to stoop, or lift the low? 549
Wherefore did God exalt you? Who would teach
The brute man's tameness and intelligence
Must never drop the dominating eye:
Wink — and what wonder if the mad fit break
Followed by stripes and fasting? Sound and sane,
My life, chastised now, couches at your foot.
Accept, redeem me! Do your eyes ask '*How?*'
I stand here penniless, a beggar; talk
What idle trash I may, this final blow
Of fortune fells me. *I* disburse, indeed,
This boy his winnings? when each bubble-scheme 560
That danced athwart my brain, a minute since,
The worse the better, — of repairing straight
My misadventure by fresh enterprise,
Capture of other boys in foolishness
His fellows, — when these fancies fade away
At first sight of the lost so long, the found
So late, the lady of my life, before
Whose presence I, the lost, am also found
Incapable of one least touch of mean
Expedient, I who teemed with plot and wile — 570
That family of snakes your eye bids flee!
Listen! Our troublesomest dreams die off
In daylight: I awake, and dream is — where?
I rouse up from the past: one touch dispels
England and all here. I secured long since
A certain refuge, solitary home
To hide in, should the head strike work one day,
The hand forget its cunning, or perhaps
Society grow savage, — there to end
My life's remainder, which, say what fools will, 580

Is or should be the best of life, — its fruit,
All tends to, root and stem and leaf and flower.
Come with me, love, loved once, loved only, come,
Blend loves there! Let this parenthetic doubt
Of love, in me, have been the trial-test
Appointed to all flesh at some one stage
Of soul's achievement, — when the strong man
doubts

His strength, the good man whether goodness be,
The artist in the dark seeks, fails to find
Vocation, and the saint forswears his shrine. 590

What if the lover may elude, no more
Than these, probative dark, must search the sky
Vainly for love, his soul's star? But the orb
Breaks from eclipse: I breathe again: I love!
Tempted, I fell; but fallen — fallen lie
Here at your feet, see! Leave this poor pretence
Of union with a nature and its needs
Repugnant to your needs and nature! Nay,
False, beyond falsity you reprehend
In me, is such mock marriage with such mere 600
Man-mask as — whom you witless wrong, beside,
By that expenditure of heart and brain
He recks no more of than would yonder tree
If watered with your life-blood: rains and dews
Answer its ends sufficiently, while me
One drop saves — sends to flower and fruit at last
The laggard virtue in the soul which else
Cumbers the ground! Quickened me! Call me
yours —

Yours and the world's — yours and the world's and
God's!

Yes, for you can, you only! Think! Confirm 610
Your instinct! Say, a minute since, I seemed
The castaway you count me, — all the more

Apparent shall the angelic potency
 Lift me from out perdition's deep of deeps
 To light and life and love! — that's love for you —
 Love that already dares match might with yours.
 You loved one worthy, — in your estimate, —
 When time was; you deseried the unworthy taint,
 And where was love then? No such test could
 e'er

Try my love: but you hate me and revile; 620
 Hatred, revilement — had you these to bear
 Would you, as I do, nor revile, nor hate,
 But simply love on, love the more, perchance?
 Abide by your own proof! '*Your love was love:
 Its ghost knows no forgetting!*' Heart of mine,
 Would that I dared remember! Too unwise
 Were he who lost a treasure, did himself
 Enlarge upon the sparkling eatalogue
 Of gems to her his queen who trusted late
 The keeper of her caskets! Can it be 630
 That I, eustodian of such relic still
 As your contempt permits me to retain,
 All I dare hug to breast is — '*How your glove
 Burst and displayed the long thin lily-streak!*'
 What may have followed — that is forfeit now!
 I hope the proud man has grown humble. True —
 One grace of humbleness absents itself —
 Silenee! yet love lies deeper than all words,
 And not the spoken but the speechless love
 Waits answer ere I rise and go my way." 640

Whereupon, yet one other time the name.

To end she looks the large deliberate look,
 Even prolongs it somewhat; then the soul
 Bursts forth in a clear laugh that lengthens on,

On, till — thinned, softened, silvered, one might say
The bitter runnel hides itself in sand,
Moistens the hard gray grimly comic speech.

“Ay — give the baffled angler even yet
His supreme triumph as he hailes to shore
A second time the fish once 'scaped from hook: 650
So artfully has new bait hidden old
Blood-imbrued iron! Ay, no barb's beneath
The gilded minnow here! You bid break trust,
This time, with who trusts me, — not simply bid
Me trust you, me who ruined but myself,
In trusting but myself! Since, thanks to you,
I know the feel of sin and shame, — be sure,
I shall obey you and impose them both
On one who happens to be ignorant
Although my husband — for the lure is love, 660
Your love! Try other tackle, fisher-friend!
Repentance, expiation, hopes and fears,
What you had been, may yet be, would I but
Prove helpmate to my hero — one and all
These silks and worsteds round the hook seduce
Hardly the late torn throat and mangled tongue.
Pack up, I pray, the whole assortment prompt!
Who wonders at variety of wile
In the Arch-cheat? You are the Adversary!
Your fate is of your choosing: have your choice! 670
Wander the world, — God has some end to serve
Ere he suppress you! He waits: I endure,
But interpose no finger-tip, forsooth,
To stop your passage to the pit. Enough
That I am stable, uninvolved by you
In the rush downwards: free I gaze and fixed;
Your smiles, your tears, prayers, curses move
alike

My crowned contempt. You kneel? Prostrate
yourself!

To earth, and would the whole world saw you there!"

Whereupon — "All right!" carelessly begins 680
Somebody from outside, who mounts the stair,
And sends his voice for herald of approach:
Half in half out the doorway as the door
Gives way to push.

"Old fellow, all's no good!
The train's your portion! Lay the blame on me!
I'm no diplomatist, and Bismarck's self
Had hardly braved the awful Aunt at broach
Of proposition — so has world-repute
Preceded the illustrious stranger! Ah! —"
Quick the voice changes to astonishment, 690
Then horror, as the youth stops, sees, and knows.

The man who knelt starts up from kneeling, stands
Moving no muscle, and confronts the stare.

One great red outbreak buries — throat and brow —
The lady's proud pale queenliness of scorn:
Then her great eyes that turned so quick, become
Intenser: quail at gaze, not they indeed!

V

It is the young man shatters silence first..

"Well, my lord — for indeed my lord you are,
I little guessed how rightly — this last proof
Of lordship-paramount confounds too much
My simple head-piece! Let's see how we stand
Each to the other! how we stood i' the game

Of life an hour ago, — the magpies, stile
And oak-tree witnessed. Truth exchanged for
truth —

My lord confessed his four-years-old affair —
How he seduced and then forsook the girl 10
Who married somebody and left him sad.
My pitiful experience was — I loved
A girl whose gown's hem had I dared to touch
My finger would have failed me, palsy-fixed.
She left me, sad enough, to marry — whom?
A better man, — then possibly not you!
How does the game stand? Who is who and what
Is what, o' the board now, since an hour went by?
My lord's '*seduced, forsaken, sacrificed,*'
Starts up, my lord's familiar instrument, 20
Associate and accomplice, mistress-slave —
Shares his adventure, follows on the sly!
— Ay, and since 'bag and baggage' is a phrase —
Baggage lay hid in carpet-bag belike,
Was but unpadlocked when occasion came
For holding council, since my back was turned,
On how invent ten thousand pounds which, paid,
Would lure the winner to lose twenty more,
Beside refunding these! Why else allow
The fool to gain them? So displays herself 30
The lady whom my heart believed — oh, laugh!
Noble and pure: whom my heart loved at once,
And who at once did speak truth when she said
'*I am not mine now but another's*' — thus
Being that other's! Devil's-marriage, eh?
'*My lie weds thine till lucre us do part?*'
But pity me the snobbish simpleton,
You two aristocratic tip-top swells
At swindling! Quits, I cry! Decamp content 39
With skin I'm peeled of: do not strip bones bare —

As that you could, I have no doubt at all!
 O you two rare ones! Male and female, Sir!
 The male there smirked, this morning, 'Come, my
 boy —

*Out with it! You've been crossed in love, I think;
 I recognize the lover's hangdog look;
 Make a clean breast and match my confidence,
 For, I'll be frank, I too have had my fling,
 Am punished for my fault, and smart enough!
 Where now the victim hides her head, God knows!'*
 Here loomed her head life-large, the devil knew! 50
 Look out, Salvini! Here's your man, your match!
 He and I stand applauding, stall by stall,
 Last Monday — '*Here's Othello*' was our word,
 '*But where's Iago?*' Where? Why, there! And
 now

The fellow-artist, female specimen —
 Oh, lady, you must needs describe yourself!
 He's great in art, but you — how greater still
 — (If I can rightly, out of all I learned,
 Apply one bit of Latin that assures 59
 '*Art means just art's concealment*') — tower yourself!
 For he stands plainly visible henceforth —
 Liar and scamp: while you, in artistry
 Prove so consummate — or I prove perhaps
 So absolute an ass — that — either way —
 You still do seem to me who worshipped you
 And see you take the homage of this man
 Your master, who played slave and knelt, no doubt,
 Before a mistress in his very craft . . .
 Well, take the fact, I nor believe my eyes,
 Nor trust my understanding! Still you seem 70
 Noble and pure as when we had the talk
 Under the tower, beneath the trees, that day.
 And there's the key explains the secret: down

He knelt to ask your leave to rise a grade
 I' the mystery of humbug: well he may!
 For how you beat him! Half an hour ago,
 I held your master for my best of friends;
 And now I hate him! Four years since, you seemed
 My heart's one love: well, and you so remain! 79
 What's he to you in craft?"

She looks him through.

"My friend, 't is just that friendship have its turn —
 Interrogate thus me whom one, of foes
 The worst, has questioned and is answered by.
 Take you as frank an answer! answers both
 Begin alike so far, divergent soon
 World-wide — I own superiority
 Over you, over him. As him I searched,
 So do you stand seen through and through by me
 Who, this time, proud, report your crystal shrines
 A dewdrop, plain as amber prisons round 90
 A spider in the hollow heart his house!
 Nowise are you that thing my fancy feared
 When out you stepped on me, a minute since,
 — This man's confederate! no, you step not thus
 Obsequiously at beck and call to help
 At need some second scheme, and supplement
 Guile by force, use my shame to pinion me
 From struggle and escape! I fancied that!
 Forgive me! Only by strange chance, — most
 strange
 In even this strange world, — you enter now, 100
 Obtain your knowledge. Me you have not wronged
 Who never wronged you — least of all, my friend,
 That day beneath the College tower and trees,
 When I refused to say, — '*not friend but, love!*'

Had I been found as free as air when first
 We met, I scarcely could have loved you. No —
 For where was that in you which claimed return
 Of love? My eyes were all too weak to probe
 This other's seeming, but that seeming loved
 The soul in me, and lied — I know too late! 110
 While your truth was truth: and I knew at once
 My power was just my beauty — bear the word —
 As I must bear, of all my qualities,
 To name the poorest one that serves my soul
 And stimulates myself! So much in me
 You loved, I know: the something that's beneath
 Heard not your call, — uncalled, no answer comes!
 For, since in every love, or soon or late
 Soul must awake and seek out soul for soul,
 Yours, overlooking mine then, would, some day, 120
 Take flight to find some other; so it proved —
 Missing me, you were ready for this man.
 I apprehend the whole relation: his —
 The soul wherein you saw your type of worth
 At once, true object of your tribute. Well
 Might I refuse such half-heart's homage! Love
 Divining, had assured you I no more -
 Stand his participant in infamy
 Than you — I need no love to recognize
 As simple dupe and nowise fellow-cheat! 130
 Therefore accept one last friend's-word, — your
 friend's,
 All men's friend, save a felon's. Ravel out
 The bad embroilment howso'er you may,
 Distribute as it please you praise or blame
 To me — so you but fling this mockery far —
 Renounce this rag-and-feather hero-sham,
 This poodle clipt to pattern, lion-like!
 Throw him his thousands back, and lay to heart

The lesson I was sent, — if man discerned
 Ever God's message, — just to teach. I judge — 140
 To far another issue than could dream
 Your cousin, — younger, fairer, as befits —
 Who summoned me to judgment's exercise.
 I find you, save in folly, innocent.
 And in my verdict lies your fate; at choice
 Of mine your cousin takes or leaves you. '*Take!*'
 I bid her — for you tremble back to truth.
 She turns the scale, — one touch of the pure hand
 Shall so press down, emprison past relapse
 Farther vibration 'twixt veracity — 150
 That 's honest solid earth — and falsehood, theft
 And air, that 's one illusive emptiness!
 That reptile capture you? I conquered him:
 You saw him cower before me. Have no fear
 He shall offend you farther! Spare to spurn —
 Safe let him slink hence till some subtler Eve
 Than I, anticipate the snake — bruise head
 Ere he bruise heel — or, wariar than the first,
 Some Adam purge earth's garden of its pest
 Before the slaver spoil the Tree of Life! 160

"You! Leave this youth, as he leaves you, as I
 Leave each! There's caution surely extant yet
 Though conscience in you were too vain a claim.
 Hence quickly! Keep the cash but leave unsoiled
 The heart I rescue and would lay to heal
 Beside another's! Never let her know
 How near came taint of your companionship!"

"Ah" — draws a long breath with a new strange
 look
 The man she interpellates — soul a-stir
 Under its covert, as, beneath the dust, 170

A coppery sparkle all at once denotes
The hid snake has conceived a purpose.

“Ah —

Innocence should be crowned with ignorance?
Desirable indeed, but difficult!
As if yourself, now, had not glorified
Your helpmate by imparting him a hint
Of how a monster made the victim bleed
Ere crook and courage saved her — hint, I say, —
Not the whole horror, — that were needless risk, —
But just such inkling, fancy of the fact, 180
As should suffice to qualify henceforth
The shepherd, when another lamb would stray,
For warning ‘*Ware the wolf!*’ No doubt at all,
Silence is generosity, — keeps wolf
Unhunted by flock’s warder! Excellent,
Did — generous to me, mean — just to him!
But, screening the deceiver, lamb were found
Outraging the deceitless! So, — he knows!
And yet, unharmed I breathe — perchance, repent —
Thanks to the mercifully-politic!” 190

“Ignorance is not innocence but sin —
Witness yourself ignore what after-pangs
Pursue the plague-infected. Merciful
Am I? Perhaps! The more contempt, the less
Hatred; and who so worthy of contempt
As you that rest assured I cooled the spot
I could not cure, by poisoning, forsooth,
Whose hand I pressed there? Understand for once
That, sick, of all the pains corroding me
This burnt the last and nowise least — the need 200
Of simulating soundness. I resolved —
No matter how the struggle tasked weak flesh —

To hide the truth away as in a grave
 From — most of all — my husband: he nor knows
 Nor ever shall be made to know your part,
 My part, the devil's part, — I trust, God's part
 In the foul matter. Saved, I yearn to save
 And not destroy: and what destruction like
 The abolishing of faith in him, that's faith
 In me as pure and true? Acquaint some child 210
 Who takes yon tree into his confidence,
 That, where he sleeps now, was a murder done,
 And that the grass which grows so thick, he thinks,
 Only to pillow him is product just
 Of what lies festering beneath! 'T is God
 Must bear such secrets and disclose them. Man?
 The miserable thing I have become
 By dread acquaintance with my secret — *you* —
 That thing had he become by learning *me* —
 The miserable, whom his ignorance 220
 Would wrongly call the wicked: ignorance
 Being, I hold, sin ever, small or great.
 No, he knows nothing!"

"He and I alike
 Are bound to you for such discreetness, then.
 What if our talk should terminate awhile?
 Here is a gentleman to satisfy,
 Settle accounts with, pay ten thousand pounds
 Before we part — as, by his face, I fear,
 Results from your appearance on the scene.
 Grant me a minute's parley with my friend 230
 Which scarce admits of a third personage!
 The room from which you made your entry first
 So opportunely — still untenanted —
 What if you please return there? Just a word
 To my young friend first — then, a word to you,

And you depart to fan away each fly
From who, grass-pillowed, sleeps so sound at home!"

"So the old truth comes back! A wholesome
change, —

At last the altered eye, the rightful tone!
But even to the truth that drops disguise 240
And stands forth grinning malice which but now
Whined so contritely — I refuse assent
Just as to malice. I, once gone, come back?
No, my lord! I enjoy the privilege
Of being absolutely loosed from you
Too much — the knowledge that your power is null
Which was omnipotence. A word of mouth,
A wink of eye would have detained me once,
Body and soul your slave; and now, thank God,
Your fawningest of prayers, your frightfulest 250
Of curses — neither would avail to turn
My footstep for a moment!"

"Prayer, then, tries
No such adventure. Let us cast about
For something novel in expedient: take
Command, — what you say? I profess myself
One fertile in resource. Commanding, then,
I bid — not only wait there, but return
Here, where I want you! Disobey and — good
On your own head the peril!"

"Come!" breaks in
The boy with his good glowing face. "Shut up! 260
None of this sort of thing while I stand here
— Not to stand that! No bullying, I beg!
I also am to leave you presently
And never more set eyes upon your face —

You won't mind that much; but — I tell you frank —
I do mind having to remember this
For your last word and deed — my friend who were!
Bully a woman you have ruined, eh?
Do you know, — I give credit all at once
To all those stories everybody told 270
And nobody but I would disbelieve:
They all seem likely now, — nay, certain, sure!
I dare say you did cheat at cards that night
The row was at the Club: '*sauter la coupe*' —
That was your 'cut,' for which your friends 'cut'
you;

While I, the booby, 'cut' — acquaintanceship
With who so much as laughed when I said '*luck!*'
I dare say you had bets against the horse
They doctored at the Derby; little doubt,
That fellow with the sister found you shirk 280
His challenge and did kick you like a ball,
Just as the story went about! Enough:
It only serves to show how well advised,
Madam, you were in bidding such a fool
As I, go hang. You see how the mere sight
And sound of you suffice to tumble down
Conviction topsy-turvy: no, — that 's false, —
There 's no unknowing what one knows; and yet
Such is my folly that, in gratitude 289
For . . . well, I 'm stupid; but you seemed to wish
I should know gently what I know, should slip
Softly from old to new, not break my neck
Between beliefs of what you were and are.
Well then, for just the sake of such a wish
To cut no worse a figure than needs must
In even eyes like mine, I 'd sacrifice
Body and soul! But don't think danger — pray! —
Menaces either! He do harm to us?

Let me say 'us' this one time! You'd allow
 I lent perhaps my hand to rid your ear 300
 Of some cur's yelping — hand that's fortified,
 Into the bargain, with a horsewhip? Oh,
 One crack and you shall see how curs decamp!
 My lord, you know your losses and my gains.
 Pay me my money at the proper time!
 If cash be not forthcoming, — well, yourself
 Have taught me, and tried often, I'll engage,
 The proper course: I post you at the Club,
 Pillory the defaulter. Crack, to-day, 309
 Shall, slash, to-morrow, slice through flesh and bone!
 There, Madam, you need mind no cur, I think!"

"Ah, what a gain to have an apt no less
 Than grateful scholar! Nay, he brings to mind
 My knowledge till he puts me to the blush,
 So long has it lain rusty! Post my name!
 That were indeed a wheal from whipcord! Whew!
 I wonder now if I could rummage out
 — Just to match weapons — some old scorpion-
 scourge! .

Madam, you hear my pupil, may applaud
 His triumph o'er the master. I — no more 320
 Bully, since I'm forbidden: but entreat —
 Wait and return — for my sake, no! but just
 To save your own defender, should he chance
 Get thwacked thro' awkward flourish of his thong.
 And what if — since all waiting's weary work —
 I help the time pass 'twixt your exit now
 And entry then? for — pastime proper — here's
 The very thing, the Album, verse and prose
 To make the laughing minutes launch away!
 Each of us must contribute. I'll begin — 330
 'Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!'

I'm confident I beat the bard, — for why?
 My young friend owns me an Iago — him
 Confessed, among the other qualities,
 A ready rhymers. Oh, he rhymed! Here goes!
 — Something to end with '*horsewhip*'! No, that
 rhyme

Beats me; there's '*cowslip*,' '*boltspit*,' nothing else!
 So, Tennyson take my benison, — verse for bard,
 Prose suits the gambler's book best! Dared and
 done!"

Wherewith he dips pen, writes a line or two, 340
 Closes and clasps the cover, gives the book,
 Bowing the while, to her who hesitates,
 Turns half away, turns round again, at last
 Takes it as you touch carrion, then retires.
 The door shuts fast the couple.

VI

With a change

Of his whole manner, opens out at once
 The Adversary.

“Now, my friend, for you!
 You who, protected late, aggressive grown,
 Brandish, it seems, a weapon I must 'ware!
 Plain speech in me becomes respectable
 Henceforth, because courageous; plainly, then —
 (Have lash well loose, hold handle tight and light!)
 Throughout my life's experience, you indulged
 Yourself and friend by passing in review 10
 So courteously but now, I vainly search
 To find one record of a specimen
 So perfect of the pure and simple fool
 As this you furnish me. Ingratitude

I lump with folly, — all's one lot, — so — fool!
 Did I seek you or you seek me? Seek? sneak
 For service to, and service you would style —
 And did style — godlike, scarce an hour ago!
 Fool, there again, yet not precisely there
 First-rate in folly: since the hand you kissed 20
 Did pick you from the kennel, did plant firm
 Your footstep on the pathway, did persuade
 Your awkward shamble to true gait and pace,
 Fit for the world you walk in. Once a-strut
 On that firm pavement which your cowardice
 Was for renouncing as a pitfall, next
 Came need to clear your brains of their conceit
 They cleverly could distinguish who was who,
 Whatever folk might tramp the thoroughfare.
 Men, now — familiarly you read them off, 30
 Each phiz at first sight! O you had an eye!
 Who couched it? made you disappoint each fox
 Eager to strip my gosling of his fluff
 So golden as he cackled 'Goose trusts lamb'?
 'Ay, but I saved you — wolf defeated fox —
 Wanting to pick your bones myself!' then, wolf
 Has got the worst of it with goose for once.
 I, penniless, pay you ten thousand pounds
 (— No gesture, pray! I pay ere I depart.)
 And how you turn advantage to account 40
 Here's the example. Have I proved so wrong
 In my peremptory '*debt must be discharged*'?
 O you laughed lovelily, were loth to leave
 The old friend out at elbows — pooh, a thing
 Not to be thought of! I must keep my cash,
 And you forget your generosity!
 Ha ha, I took your measure when I laughed
 My laugh to that! First quarrel — nay, first faint
 Pretence at taking umbrage — '*Down with debt,*

Both interest and principal! — The Club, 50
Exposure and expulsion! — stamp me out!
 That 's the magnanimous magnificent
 Renunciation of advantage! Well,
 But whence and why did you take umbrage, Sir?
 Because your master, having made you know
 Somewhat of men, was minded to advance,
 Expound you women, still a mystery!
 My pupil potted with a cloud on brow,
 A clod in breast: had loved, and vainly loved: 59
 Whence blight and blackness, just for all the world
 As Byron used to teach us boys. Thought I —
 'Quick rid him of that rubbish! Clear the cloud,
 And set the heart a-pulsing!' — heart, this time:
 'T was nothing but the head I doctored late
 For ignorance of Man; now heart 's to dose,
 Palsied by over-palpitation due
 To Woman-worship — so, to work at once
 On first avowal of the patient's ache!
 This morning you described your malady, —
 How you dared love a piece of virtue — lost 70
 To reason, as the upshot showed: for scorn
 Fitly repaid your stupid arrogance;
 And, parting, you went two ways, she resumed
 Her path — perfection, while forlorn you paced
 The world that 's made for beasts like you and me.
 My remedy was — tell the fool the truth!
 Your paragon of purity had plumped
 Into these arms at their first outspread — 'fallen
 My victim,' she prefers to turn the phrase —
 And, in exchange for that frank confidence, 80
 Asked for my whole life present and to come —
 Marriage: a thing uncovenanted for,
 Never so much as put in question. Life —
 Implied by marriage — throw that trifle in

And round the bargain off, no otherwise
 Than if, when we played cards, because you won
 My money you should also want my head!
 That, I demurred to: we but played '*for love*' —
 She won my love; had she proposed for stakes 89
 '*Marriage*,' — why, that's for whist, a wiser game.
 Whereat she raved at me, as losers will,
 And went her way. So far the story's known,
 The remedy's applied, no farther: which
 Here's the sick man's first *honorarium* for —
 Posting his medicine-monger at the Club!
 That being, Sir, the whole you mean my fee —
 In gratitude for such munificence
 I'm bound in common honesty to spare
 No droplet of the draught: so, — pinch your nose,
 Pull no wry faces! — drain it to the dregs! 100
 I say '*She went off*' — '*went off*,' you subjoin,
 '*Since not to wedded bliss, as I supposed,*
Sure to some convent: solitude and peace
Help her to hide the shame from mortal view,
With prayer and fasting.' No, my sapient Sir!
 Far wisclier, straightway she betook herself
 To a prize-portent from the donkey-show
 Of leathern long-ears that compete for palm
 In clerical absurdity: since he,
 Good ass, nor practises the shaving-trick, 110
 The candle-crotchet, nonsense which repays
 When you've young ladies congregant, — but schools
 The poor, — toils, moils and grinds the mill nor
 means
 To stop and munch one thistle in this life
 Till next life smother him with roses: just
 The parson for her purpose! Him she stroked
 Over the muzzle; into mouth with bit,
 And onto back with saddle, — there he stood,

The serviceable beast who heard, believed
 And meekly bowed him to the burden, — borne 120
 Off in a canter to seclusion — ay,
 The lady's lost! But had a friend of mine
 — While friend he was — imparted his sad case
 To sympathizing counsellor, full soon
 One cloud at least had vanished from his brow.
 'Don't fear!' had followed reassuringly —
 'The lost will in due time turn up again,
 Probably just when, weary of the world,
 You think of nothing less than settling-down
 To country life and golden days, beside 130
 A dearest best and brightest virtuouslest
 Wife: who needs no more hope to hold her own
 Against the naughty-and-repentant — no,
 Than water-gruel against Roman punch!'

And as I prophesied, it proves! My youth, —
 Just at the happy moment when, subdued
 To spooniness, he finds that youth fleets fast,
 That town-life tires, that men should drop boys'
 play,
 That property, position have, no doubt,
 Their exigency with their privilege, 140
 And if the wealthy wed with wealth, how dire
 The double duty! — in, behold, there beams
 Our long-lost lady, form and face complete!
 And where's my moralizing pupil now,
 Had not his master missed a train by chance?
 But, by your side instead of whirled away,
 How have I spoiled scene, stopped catastrophe,
 Struck flat the stage-effect I know by heart!
 Sudden and strange the meeting — improvised?
 Bless you, the last event she hoped or dreamed! 150
 But rude sharp stroke will crush out fire from flint
 Assuredly from flesh. "T is you?" 'Myself.'

‘*Changed?*’ ‘*Changeless.*’ ‘*Then, what’s earth to me?*’ ‘*To me*
What’s heaven?’ ‘*So, — thine!*’ ‘*And thine!*’ ‘*And likewise mine!*’

Had laughed ‘*Amen*’ the devil, but for me
 Whose intermeddling hinders this hot haste,
 And bids you, ere concluding contract, pause —
 Ponder one lesson more, then sign and seal
 At leisure and at pleasure, — lesson’s price
 Being, if you have skill to estimate, 160
 — How say you? — I’m discharged my debt in full!
 Since paid you stand, to farthing uttermost,
 Unless I fare like that black majesty
 A friend of mine had visit from last Spring.
 Coasting along the Cape-side, he’s becalmed
 Off an uncharted bay, a novel town
 Untouched at by the trader: here’s a chance!
 Out paddles straight the king in his canoe,
 Comes over bulwark, says he means to buy
 Ship’s cargo — being rich and having brought 170
 A treasure ample for the purpose. See!
 Four dragons, stalwart blackies, guard the same
 Wrapped round and round: its hulls, a multitude, —
 Palm-leaf and cocoa-mat and goat’s-hair cloth
 All duly braced about with bark and board, —
 Suggest how brave, ’neath coat, must kernel be!
 At length the peeling is accomplished, plain
 The casket opens out its core, and lo
 — A brand-new British silver sixpence — bid
 That’s ample for the Bank, — thinks majesty! 180
 You are the Captain; call my sixpence cracked
 Or copper; ‘*what I’ve said is calumny;*
The lady’s spotless!’ Then, I’ll prove my words,
 Or make you prove them true as truth — yourself,
 Here, on the instant! I’ll not mince my speech,

Things at this issue. When she enters, then,
 Make love to her! No talk of marriage now —
 The point-blank bare proposal! Pick no phrase —
 Prevent all misconception! Soon you'll see
 How different the tactics when she deals 190
 With an instructed man, no longer boy
 Who blushes like a booby. Woman's wit!
 Man, since you have instruction, blush no more!
 Such your five minutes' profit by my pains,
 'Tis simply now — demand and be possessed!
 Which means — you may possess — may strip the
 tree

Of fruit desirable to make one wise.
 More I nor wish nor want: your act's your act,
 My teaching is but — there's the fruit to pluck
 Or let alone at pleasure. Next advance 200
 In knowledge were beyond you! Don't expect
 I bid a novice — pluck, suck, send sky-high
 Such fruit, once taught that neither crab nor sloe
 Falls readier prey to who but robs a hedge,
 Than this gold apple to my Hercules.
 Were you no novice but proficient — then,
 Then, truly, I might prompt you — Touch and taste,
 Try flavor and be tired as soon as I!
 Toss on the prize to greedy mouths agape,
 Betake yours, sobered as the satiate grow, 210
 To wise man's solid meal of house and land,
 Consols and cousin! but my boy, my boy,
 Such lore's above you!

Here's the lady back!

So, Madam, you have conned the Album-page
 And come to thank its last contributor?
 How kind and condescending! I retire
 A moment, lest I spoil the interview,

And mar my own endeavor to make friends —
 You with him, him with you, and both with me!
 If I succeed — permit me to inquire 220
 Five minutes hence! Friends bid good-by, you
 know.”
 And out he goes.

VII

She, face, form, bearing, one

Superb composure —

“He has told you all?

Yes, he has told you all, your silence says —
 What gives him, as he thinks the mastery
 Over my body and my soul! — has told
 That instance, even, of their servitude
 He now exacts of me? A silent blush!
 That’s well, though better would white ignorance
 Beseem your brow, undesecrate before —
 Ay, when I left you! I too learn at last 10
 — Hideously learned as I seemed so late —
 What sin may swell to. Yes, — I needed learn
 That, when my prophet’s rod became the snake
 I fled from, it would, one day, swallow up
 — Incorporate whatever serpentine
 Falsehood and treason and unmanliness
 Beslime earth’s pavement: such the power of Hell,
 And so beginning, ends no otherwise
 The Adversary! I was ignorant,
 Blameworthy — if you will; but blame I take 20
 Nowise upon me as I ask myself
 — *You* — how can you, whose soul I seemed to read
 The limpid eyes through, have declined so deep
 Even with him for consort? I revolve
 Much memory, pry into the looks and words
 Of that day’s walk beneath the College wall,

And nowhere can distinguish, in what gleams
 Only pure marble through my dusky past,
 A dubious cranny where such poison-seed
 Might harbor, nourish what should yield to-day 30
 This dread ingredient for the cup I drink.
 Do not I recognize and honor truth
 In seeming? — take your truth and for return,
 Give you my truth, a no less precious gift?
 You loved me: I believed you. I replied
 — How could I other? '*I was not my own,*'
 — No longer had the eyes to see, the ears
 To hear, the mind to judge, since heart and soul
 Now were another's. My own right in me,
 For well or ill, consigned away — my face 40
 Fronted the honest path, deflection whence
 Had shamed me in the furtive backward look
 At the late bargain — fit such chapman's phrase! —
 As though — less hasty and more provident —
 Waiting had brought advantage. Not for me
 The chapman's chance! Yet while thus much was
 true,
 I spared you — as I knew you then — one more
 Concluding word which, truth no less, seemed best
 Buried away forever. Take it now 49
 Its power to pain is past! Four years — that day —
 Those limes that make the College avenue!
 I would that — friend and foe — by miracle,
 I had, that moment, seen into the heart
 Of either, as I now am taught to see!
 I do believe I should have straight assumed
 My proper function, and sustained a soul,
 Nor aimed at being just sustained myself
 By some man's soul — the weaker woman's-want!
 So had I missed the momentary thrill
 Of finding me in presence of a god, 60

But gained the god's own feeling when he gives
 Such thrill to what turns life from death before.
'Gods many and Lords many,' says the Book:
 You would have yielded up your soul to me
 — Not to the false god who has burned its clay
 In his own image. I had shed my love
 Like Spring dew on the clod all flowery thence,
 Not sent up a wild vapor to the sun
 That drinks and then disperses. Both of us
 Blameworthy, — I first meet my punishment — 70
 And not so hard to bear. I breathe again!
 Forth from those arms' enwinding leprosy
 At last I struggle — uncontaminate:
 Why must I leave *you* pressing to the breast
 That 's all one plague-spot? Did you love me
 once?

Then take love's last and best return! I think,
 Womanliness means only motherhood;
 All love begins and ends there, — roams enough,
 But, having run the circle, rests at home.
 Why is your expiation yet to make? 80
 Pull shame with your own hands from your own
 head

Now, — never wait the slow envelopment
 Submitted to by unelastic age!
 One fierce throe frees the sapling: flake on flake
 Lull till they leave the oak snow-stupefied.
 Your heart retains its vital warmth — or why
 That blushing reassurance? Blush, young blood!
 Break from beneath this icy premature
 Captivity of wickedness — I warn 89
 Back, in God's name! No fresh encroachment here!
 This May breaks all to bud — no Winter now!
 Friend, we are both forgiven! Sin no more!
 I am past sin now, so shall you become!

Meanwhile I testify that, lying once,
My foe lied ever, most lied last of all.
He, waking, whispered to your sense asleep
The wicked counsel, — and assent might seem;
But, roused, your healthy indignation breaks
The idle dream-pact. You would die — not dare 99
Confirm your dream-resolve, — nay, find the word
That fits the deed to bear the light of day!
Say I have justly judged you! then farewell
To blushing — nay, it ends in smiles, not tears!
Why tears now? I have justly judged, thank God!”

He does blush boy-like, but the man speaks out,
— Makes the due effort to surmount himself.

“I don’t know what he wrote — how should I? Nor
How he could read my purpose which, it seems,
He chose to somehow write — mistakenly
Or else for mischief’s sake. I scarce believe 110
My purpose put before you fair and plain
Would need annoy so much; but there’s my luck —
From first to last I blunder. Still, one more
Turn at the target, try to speak my thought!
Since he could guess my purpose, won’t you read
Right what he set down wrong? He said — let’s
think!

Ay, so! — he did begin by telling heaps
Of tales about you. Now, you see — suppose
Any one told me — my own mother died
Before I knew her — told me — to his cost! — 120
Such tales about my own dead mother: why,
You would not wonder surely if I knew,
By nothing but my own heart’s help, he lied,
Would you? No reason’s wanted in the case.
So with you! In they burnt on me, his tales,

Much as when madhouse-inmates crowd around,
 Make captive any visitor and scream
 All sorts of stories of their keeper — he's
 Both dwarf and giant, vulture, wolf, dog, eat,
 Serpent and scorpion, yet man all the same; 130
 Sane people soon see through the gibberish!
 I just made out, you somehow lived somewhere
 A life of shame — I can't distinguish more —
 Married or single — how, don't matter much:
 Shame which himself had caused — that point was
 clear,

That fact confessed — that thing to hold and keep.
 Oh, and he added some absurdity
 — That you were here to make me — ha, ha, ha! —
 Still love you, still of mind to die for you,
 Ha, ha — as if that needed mighty pains! 140
 Now, foolish as . . . but never mind myself
 — What I am, what I am not, in the eye
 Of the world, is what I never cared for much.
 Fool then or no fool, not one single word
 In the whole string of lies did I believe,
 But this — this only — if I choke, who cares? —
 I believe somehow in your purity
 Perfect as ever! Else what use is God?
 He is God, and work miracles He can!
 Then, what shall I do? Quite as clear, my course! 150
 They've got a thing they call their Labyrinth
 I' the garden yonder: and my cousin played
 A pretty trick once, led and lost me deep
 Inside the briery maze of hedge round hedge;
 And there might I be staying now, stock-still,
 But that I laughing bade eyes follow nose
 And so straight pushed my path through let and stop
 And soon was out in the open, face all scratched,
 But well behind my back the prison-bars

In sorry plight enough, I promise you! 160
 So here: I won my way to truth through lies —
 Said, as I saw light, — if her shame be shame
 I'll rescue and redeem her, — shame's no shame?
 Then, I'll avenge, protect — redeem myself
 The stupidest of sinners! Here I stand!
 Dear, — let me once dare call you so, — you said
 Thus ought you to have done, four years ago,
 Such things and such! Ay, dear, and what ought I?
 You were revealed to me: where's gratitude,
 Where's memory even, where the gain of you 170
 Discernible in my low after-life
 Of fancied consolation? why, no horse
 Once fed on corn, will, missing corn, go munch
 Mere thistles like a donkey! I missed you,
 And in your place found — him, made him my love,
 Ay, did I, — by this token, that he taught
 So much beast-nature that I meant . . . God knows
 Whether I bow me to the dust enough! . . .
 To marry — yes, my cousin here! I hope
 That was a master-stroke! Take heart of hers, 180
 And give her hand of mine with no more heart
 Than now you see upon this brow I strike!
 What atom of a heart do I retain
 Not all yours? Dear, you know it! Easily
 May she accord me pardon when I place
 My brow beneath her foot, if foot so deign,
 Since uttermost indignity is spared —
 Mere marriage and no love! And all this time
 Not one word to the purpose! Are you free?
 Only wait! only let me serve — deserve 190
 Where you appoint and how you see the good!
 I have the will — perhaps the power — at least
 Means that have power against the world. For
 time —

Take my whole life for your experiment!
If you are bound — in marriage, say — why, still,
Still, sure, there's something for a friend to do,
Outside? A mere well-wisher, understand!
I'll sit, my life long, at your gate, you know,
Swing it wide open to let you and him .
Pass freely, — and you need not look, much less 200
Fling me a '*Thank you — are you there, old friend?*'
Don't say that even: I should drop like shot!
So I feel now at least: some day, who knows?
After no end of weeks and months and years
You might smile '*I believe you did your best!*'
And that shall make my heart leap — leap such leap
As lands the feet in Heaven to wait you there!
Ah, there's just one thing more! How pale you look!
Why? Are you angry? If there's, after all,
Worst come to worst — if still there somehow be 210
The shame — I said was no shame, — none, I
swear! —
In that case, if my hand and what it holds, —
My name, — might be your safeguard now — at
once —
Why, here's the hand — you have the heart! Of
course —
No cheat, no binding you, because I'm bound,
To let me off probation by one day,
Week, month, year, lifetime! Prove as you propose!
Here's the hand with the name to take or leave!
That's all — and no great piece of news, I hope!"

"Give me the hand, then!" she cries hastily. 220
"Quick, now! I hear his footstep!"

Hand in hand
The couple face him as he enters, stops

Short, stands surprised a moment, laughs away
 Surprise, resumes the much-experienced man.

“So, you accept him?”

“Till us death do part!”

“No longer? Come, that ’s right and rational!”
 I fancied there was power in common sense,
 But did not know it worked thus promptly. Well —
 At last each understands the other, then?
 Each drops disguise, then? So, at supper-time 230
 These masquerading people doff their gear,
 Grand Turk his pompous turban, Quakeress
 Her stiff-starched bib and tucker, — make-believe
 That only bothers when, ball-business done,
 Nature demands champagne and *mayonnaise*.
 Just so has each of us sage three abjured
 His and her moral pet particular
 Pretension to superiority,
 And, cheek by jowl, we henceforth munch and joke!
 Go, happy pair, paternally dismissed 240
 To live and die together — for a month,
 Discretion can award no more! Depart
 From whatsoe’er the calm sweet solitude
 Selected — Paris not improbably —
 At month’s end, when the honeycomb’s left wax,
 — You, daughter, with a pocketful of gold
 Enough to find your village boys and girls
 In duffel cloaks and hobnailed shoes from May
 To — what’s the phrase? — Christmas-come-never-
 mas!

You, son and heir of mine, shall re-appear 250
 Ere Spring-time, that’s the ring-time, lose one leaf,
 And — not without regretful smack of lip

The while you wipe it free of honey-smear —
Marry the cousin, play the magistrate,
Stand for the county, prove perfection's pink —
Master of hounds, gay-coated dine — nor die
Sooner than needs of gout, obesity,
And sons at Christ Church! As for me, — ah me,
I abdicate — retire on my success,
Four years well occupied in teaching youth 260
— My son and daughter the exemplary!
Time for me to retire now, having placed
Proud on their pedestal the pair: in turn,
Let them do homage to their master! You, —
Well, your flushed cheek and flashing eye proclaim
Sufficiently your gratitude: you paid
The *honorarium*, the ten thousand pounds
To purpose, did you not? I told you so!
And you, but, bless me, why so pale — so faint
At influx of good fortune? Certainly, 270
No matter how or why or whose the fault,
I save your life — save it, nor less nor more!
You blindly were resolved to welcome death
In that black boor-and-bumpkin-haunted hole
Of his, the prig with all the preachments! *You*
Installed as nurse and matron to the crones
And wenches, while there lay a world outside
Like Paris (which again I recommend)
In company and guidance of — first, this, 279
Then — all in good time — some new friend as fit —
What if I were to say, some fresh myself,
As I once figured? Each dog has his day,
And mine's at sunset: what should old dog do
But eye young litters' frisky puppyhood?
Oh I shall watch this beauty and this youth
Frisk it in brilliance! But don't fear! Discreet,
I shall pretend to no more recognize

My quondam pupils than the doctor nods
 When certain old acquaintances may cross
 His path in Park, or sit down prim beside 290
 His plate at dinner-table: tip nor wink
 Scares patients he has put, for reason good,
 Under restriction, — maybe, talked sometimes
 Of douche or horsewhip to, — for why? because
 The gentleman would crazily declare
 His best friend was — Iago! Ay, and worse —
 The lady, all at once grown lunatic,
 In suicidal monomania vowed,
 To save her soul, she needs must starve herself!
 They 're cured now, both, and I tell nobody. 300
 Why don't you speak? Nay, speechless, each of you
 Can spare, — without unclasping plighted troth, —
 At least one hand to shake! Left-hands will do —
 Yours first, my daughter! Ah, it guards — it gripes
 The precious Album fast — and prudently!
 As well obliterate the record there
 On page the last: allow me tear the leaf!
 Pray, now! And afterward, to make amends,
 What if all three of us contribute each
 A line to that prelusive fragment, — help 310
 The embarrassed bard who broke out to break down
 Dumbfounded at such unforeseen success?
 '*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot*'
 You begin — *place aux dames!* I'll prompt you
 then!
 '*Here do I take the good the gods allot!*'
 Next you, Sir! What, still sulky? Sing, O Muse!
 '*Here does my lord in full discharge his shot!*'
 Now for the crowning flourish! mine shall be . . .”

“Nothing to match your first effusion, mar
 What was, is, shall remain your masterpiece! 320

Authorship has the alteration-itch!

No, I protest against erasure. Read,
My friend!" (she gasps out). "Read and quickly
read

'*Before us death do part,*' what made you mine
And made me yours — the marriage-license here!
Decide if he is like to mend the same!"
And so the lady, white to ghastliness,
Manages somehow to display the page
With left-hand only, while the right retains
The other hand, the young man's, — dreaming-
drunk

330

He, with this drench of stupefying stuff,
Eyes wide, mouth open, — half the idiot's stare
And half the prophet's insight, — holding tight,
All the same, by his one fact in the world —
The lady's right-hand: he but seems to read —
Does not, for certain; yet, how understand
Unless he reads?

So, understand he does,
For certain. Slowly, word for word, *she* reads
Aloud that license — or that warrant, say.

"*'One against two — and two that urge their odds* 340
To uttermost — I needs must try resource!
Madam, I laid me prostrate, bade you spurn
Body and soul: you spurned and safely spurned
So you had spared me the superfluous taunt
"Prostration means no power to stand erect,
Stand, trampling on who trampled — prostrate now!"
So, with my other fool-foe: I was fain
Let the boy touch me with the buttoned foil,
And him the infection gains, he too must needs
Catch up the butcher's cleaver. Be it so! 350
Since play turns earnest, here's my serious fence,

*He loves you; he demands your love: both know
 What love means in my language. Love him then!
 Pursuant to a pact, love pays my debt:
 Therefore, delivering me from him, thereby
 Likewise delivering from me yourself!
 For, hesitate — much more, refuse consent —
 I tell the whole truth to your husband. Flat
 Cards lie on table, in our gamester-phrase!
 Consent — you stop my mouth, the only way.'* 360

“I did well, trusting instinct: knew your hand
 Had never joined with his in fellowship
 Over the pact of infamy. You known —
 As he was known through every nerve of me.
 Therefore I ‘*stopped his mouth the only way*’
 But *my way*! none was left for you, my friend —
 The loyal — near, the loved one! No — no — no!
 Threaten? Chastise? The coward would but quail
 Conquer who can, the cunning of the snake!
 Stamp out his slimy strength from tail to head, 370
 And still you leave vibration of the tongue.
 His malice had redoubled — not on me
 Who, myself, choose my own refining fire —
 But on poor unsuspecting innocence;
 And, — victim, — to turn executioner
 Also — that feat effected, forked tongue
 Had done indeed its office! One snake’s ‘*mouth*’
 Thus ‘*open*’ — how could mortal ‘*stop it*’?”

“So!”

A tiger-flash — yell, spring, and scream: halloo! 379
 Death’s out and on him, has and holds him — ugh!
 But *ne trucidet coram populo*
Juvenis senem! Right the Horatian rule!

There, see how soon a quiet comes to pass!

VIII

The youth is somehow by the lady's side.
His right-hand grasps her right-hand once again.
Both gaze on the dead body. Hers the word.

“And that was good but useless. Had I lived
The danger was to dread: but, dying now —
Himself would hardly become talkative,
Since talk no more means torture. Fools — what
fools

These wicked men are! Had I borne four years,
Four years of weeks and months and days and nights,
Inured me to the consciousness of life 10
Coiled round by his life, with the tongue to ply, —
But that I bore about me, for prompt use
At urgent need, the thing that ‘*stops the mouth*’
And stays the venom? Since such need was now
Or never, — how should use not follow need?
Bear witness for me, I withdraw from life
By virtue of the license — warrant, say,
That blackens yet this Album — white again,
Thanks still to my one friend who tears the page!
Now, let me write the line of supplement, 20
As counselled by my foe there: ‘*each a line!*’ ”

And she does falteringly write to end.

“*I die now through the villain who lies dead,
Righteously slain. He would have outraged me,
So, my defender slew him. God protect
The right! Where wrong lay, I bear witness now!
Let man believe me, whose last breath is spent
In blessing my defender from my soul!*”

And so ends the Inn Album.

As she dies,
 Begins outside a voice that sounds like song, 30
 And is indeed half song though meant for speech
 Muttered in time to motion — stir of heart
 That unsubduably must bubble forth
 To match the fawn-step as it mounts the stair

“All’s ended and all’s over! Verdict found
 ‘*Not guilty*’ — prisoner forthwith set free,
 Mid cheers the Court pretends to disregard!
 Now Portia, now for Daniel, late severe,
 At last appeased, benignant! ‘*This young man —*
Hem — has the young man’s foibles but no fault. 40
He’s virgin soil — a friend must cultivate.
I think no plant called “love” grows wild — a friend
May introduce, and name the bloom, the fruit!’
 Here somebody dares wave a handkerchief —
 She’ll want to hide her face with presently!
 Good-by then! ‘*Cigno fedel, cigno fedel,*
Addio!’ Now, was ever such mistake —
 Ever such foolish ugly omen? Pshaw!
 Wagner, beside! ‘*Amo te solo, te*
Solo amai!’ That’s worth fifty such! 50
 But, mum, the grave face at the opened door!”

And so the good gay girl, with eyes and cheeks
 Diamond and damask, — cheeks so white erewhile
 Because of a vague fancy, idle fear
 Chased on reflection! — pausing, taps discreet;
 And then, to give herself a countenance,
 Before she comes upon the pair inside,
 Loud — the oft-quoted, long-laughed-over line —
 “‘*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*’
 Open the door!”

No: let the curtain fall!

60

THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC

1878

I

SUCH a starved bank of moss
Till that May-morn,
Blue ran the flash across:
Violets were born!

II

Sky — what a scowl of cloud
Till, near and far,
Ray on ray split the shroud:
Splendid, a star!

III

(World — how it walled about
Life with disgrace
Till God's own smile came out:
That was thy face!)

10

I

“FAME!” Yes, I said it and you read it. First,
Praise the good log-fire! Winter howls without.
Crowd closer, let us! Ha, the secret nursed
Inside yon hollow, crusted roundabout
With copper where the clamp was, — how the burst
Vindicates flame the stealthy feeder! Spout
Thy splendidest — a minute and no more?
So soon again all sobered as before?

II

Nay, for I need to see your face! One stroke
 Adroitly dealt, and low, the pomp revealed! 10
 Fire in his pandemonium, heart of oak
 Palatial, where he wrought the works concealed
 Beneath the solid-seeming roof I broke,
 As redly up and out and off they reeled
 Like disconcerted imps, those thousand sparks
 From fire's slow tunnelling of vaults and arcs!

III

Up, out, and off, see! Were you never used, —
 You now, in childish days or rather nights, —
 As I was, to watch sparks fly? not amused
 By that old nurse-taught game which gave the
 sprites 20
 Each one his title and career, — confused
 Belief 't was all long over with the flights
 From earth to heaven of hero, sage and bard,
 And bade them once more strive for Fame's award?

IV

New long bright life! and happy chance befell —
 That I know — when some prematurely lost
 Child of disaster bore away the bell
 From some too-pampered son of fortune, crossed
 Never before my chimney broke the spell!
 Octogenarian Keats gave up the ghost, 30
 While — never mind Who was it cumbered earth —
 Sank stifled, span-long brightness, in the birth.

V

Well, try a variation of the game!
 Our log is old ship-timber, broken bulk.
 There's sea-brine spirits up the brimstone flame,
 That crimson-curly spiral proves the hulk

Was saturate with — ask the chloride's name
 From somebody who knows! I shall not sulk
 If yonder greenish tonguelet.licked from brass
 Its life, I thought was fed on copperas. 40

VI

Anyhow, there they flutter! What may be
 The style and prowess of that purple one?
 Who is the hero other eyes shall see
 Than yours and mine? That yellow, deep to dun —
 Conjecture how the sage glows, whom not we
 But those unborn are to get warmth by! Son
 O' the coal, — as Job and Hebrew name a spark, —
 What bard, in thy red soaring, scares the dark?

VII

Oh and the lesser lights, the dearer still
 That they elude a vulgar eye, give ours 50
 The glimpse repaying astronomic skill
 Which searched sky deeper, passed those patent
 powers
 Constellate proudly, — swords, scrolls, harps, that
 fill
 The vulgar eye to surfeit, — found best flowers
 Hid deepest in the dark, — named unplucked grace
 Of soul, ungathered beauty, form or face!

VIII

Up with thee, mouldering ash men never knew,
 But I know! flash thou forth, and figure bold,
 Calm and columnar as yon flame I view!
 Oh and I bid thee, — to whom fortune doled 60
 Scantly all other gifts out — bicker blue,
 Beauty for all to see, zinc's uncontrolled
 Flake-brilliance! Not my fault if these were shown,
 Grandeur and beauty both, to me alone.

IX

No! as the first was boy's play, this proves mere
 Stripling's amusement: manhood's sport be grave!
 Choose rather sparkles quenched in mid career,
 Their boldness and their brightness could not save
 (In some old night of time on some lone drear
 Sea-coast, monopolized by crag or cave) 70
 — Save from ignoble exit into smoke,
 Silence, oblivion, all death-damps that choke!

X

Launched by our ship-wood, float we, once adrift
 In fancy to that land-strip waters wash,
 We both know well! Where uncouth tribes made
 shift
 Long since to just keep life in, billows dash
 Nigh over folk who shudder at each lift
 Of the old tyrant tempest's whirlwind-lash
 Though they have built the serviceable town 79
 Tempests but tease now, billows drench, not drown.

XI

Croisic, the spit of sandy rock which juts
 Spitefully northward, bears nor tree nor shrub
 To tempt the ocean, show what Guérande shuts
 Behind her, past wild Batz whose Saxons grub
 The ground for crystals grown where ocean gluts
 Their promontory's breadth with salt: all stub
 Of rock and stretch of sand, the land's last strife
 To rescue a poor remnant for dear life.

XII

And what life! Here was, from the world to choose,
 The Druids' chosen chief of homes: they reared
 — Only their women, — mid the slush and ooze 91
 Of yon low islet, — to their sun, revered

In strange stone guise, — a temple. May-dawn dew
 Saw the old structure levelled; when there peered
 May's earliest eve-star, high and wide once more
 Up towered the new pile perfect as before:

XIII

Secing that priestesses — and all were such —
 Unbuilt and then rebuilt it every May,
 Each alike helping — well, if not too much!
 For, mid thcir eagerness to outstrip day
 And get work done, if any loosed her clutch
 And let a single stone drop, straight a prey
 Herself fell, torn to pieces, limb from limb,
 By sisters in full chorus glad and grim.

100

XIV

And still so much remains of that gray cult,
 That even now, of nights, do women steal
 To the sole Menhir standing, and insult
 The antagonistic church-spire by appeal
 To power discrowned in vain, since each adult
 Believes the gruesome thing she clasps may heal
 Whatever plague no priestly help can cure:
 Kiss but the cold stone, the event is sure!

109

XV

Nay more: on May-morns, that primeval rite
 Of temple-building, with its punishment
 For rash precipitation, lingers, spite
 Of all remonstrance; vainly are they shent,
 Those girls who form a ring and, dressed in white,
 Dance round it, till some sister's strength be spent:
 Touch but the Menhir, straight the rest turn roughs
 From gentles, fall on her with fisticuffs.

120

XVI

Oh and, for their part, boys from door to door
 Sing unintelligible words to tunes
 As obsolete: "scraps of Druidic lore,"
 Sigh scholars, as each pale man importunes
 Vainly the mumbling to speak plain once more.
 Enough of this old worship, rounds and runes!
 They serve my purpose, which is but to show
 Croisic to-day and Croisic long ago.

XVII

What have we sailed to see, then, wafted there
 By fancy from the log that ends its days 130
 Of much adventure 'neath skies foul or fair,
 On waters rough or smooth, in this good blaze
 We two crouch round so closely, bidding care
 Keep outside with the snow-storm? Something
 says
 "Fit time for story-telling!" I begin —
 Why not at Croisic, port we first put in?

XVIII

Anywhere serves: for point me out the place
 Wherever man has made himself a home,
 And there I find the story of our race
 In little, just at Croisic as at Rome. 140
 What matters the degree? the kind I trace.
 Druids their temple, Christians have their dome:
 So with mankind; and Croisic, I'll engage,
 With Rome yields sort for sort, in age for age.

XIX

No doubt, men vastly differ: and we need
 Some strange exceptional benevolence
 Of nature's sunshine to develop seed
 So well, in the less-favored clime, that thence

We may discern how shrub means tree indeed 149
 Though dwarfed till scarcely shrub in evidence.
 Man in the ice-house or the hot-house ranks
 With beasts or gods: stove-forced, give warmth the
 thanks!

XX

While, is there any ice-checked? Such shall learn
 I am thankworthy, who propose to slake
 His thirst for tasting how it feels to turn
 Cedar from hyssop-on-the-wall. I wake
 No memories of what is harsh and stern
 In ancient Croisic-nature, much less rake
 The ashes of her last warmth till out leaps
 Live Hervé Riel, the single spark she keeps. 160

XXI

Take these two, see, each outbreak, — spirt and
 spirt
 Of fire from our brave billet's either edge
 Which — call maternal Croisic ocean-girl!
 These two shall thoroughly redeem my pledge.
 One flames fierce gules, its feeblér rival — vert,
 Heralds would tell you: heroes, I allege,
 They both were: soldiers, sailors, statesmen, priests,
 Lawyers, physicians — guess what gods or beasts!

XXII

None of them all, but — poets, if you please! 169
 “What, even there, endowed with knack of rhyme,
 Did two among the aborigines
 Of that rough region pass the ungracious time
 Suiting, to rumble-tumble of the sea's,
 The songs forbidden a serener clime?
 Or had they universal audience — that's
 To say, the folk of Croisic, ay and Batz?”

XXIII

Open your ears! Each poet in his day
 Had such a mighty moment of success
 As pinnacled him straight, in full display, 179
 For the whole world to worship — nothing less!
 Was not the whole polite world Paris, pray?
 And did not Paris, for one moment — yes,
 Worship these poet-flames, our red and green,
 One at a time, a century between?

XXIV

And yet you never heard their names! Assist,
 Clio, Historic Muse, while I record
 Great deeds! Let fact, not fancy, break the mist
 And bid each sun emerge, in turn play lord
 Of day, one moment! Hear the annalist
 Tell a strange story, true to the least word! 190
 At Croisic, sixteen hundred years and ten
 Since Christ, forth flamed yon liquid ruby, then.

XXV

Know him henceforth as René Gentilhomme
 — Appropriate appellation! noble birth
 And knightly blazon, the device wherefrom
 Was “Better do than say”! In Croisic’s dearth
 Why prison his career while Christendom
 Lay open to reward acknowledged worth?
 He therefore left it at the proper age
 And got to be the Prince of Condé’s page. 200

XXVI

Which Prince of Condé, whom men called “The
 Duke,”
 — Failing the king, his cousin, of an heir,
 (As one might hold would hap, without rebuke,

Since Anne of Austria, all the world was 'ware,
 Twenty-three years long sterile, scarce could
 look

For issue) — failing Louis of so rare
 A godsend, it was natural the Prince
 Should hear men call him "Next King" too, nor
 wince.

XXVII

Now, as this reasonable hope, by growth
 Of years, nay, tens of years, looked plump al-
 most 210
 To bursting, — would the brothers, childless both,
 Louis and Gaston, give but up the ghost —
 Condé, called "Duke" and "Next King," nothing
 loth

Awaited his appointment to the post,
 And wiled away the time, as best he might,
 Till Providence should settle things aright.

XXVIII

So, at a certain pleasure-house, withdrawn
 From cities where a whisper breeds offence,
 He sat him down to watch the streak of dawn
 Testify to first stir of Providence; 220
 And, since dull country life makes courtiers yawn,
 There wanted not a poet to dispense
 Song's remedy for spleen-fits all and some,
 Which poet was Page René Gentilhomme.

XXIX

A poet born and bred, his very sire
 A poet also, author of a piece
 Printed and published, "Ladies — their attire":
 Therefore the son, just born at his decease,

Was bound to keep alive the sacred fire,
 And kept it, yielding moderate increase 230
 Of songs and sonnets, madrigals, and much
 Rhyming thought poetry and praised as such.

XXX

Rubbish unutterable (bear in mind!)
 Rubbish not wholly without value, though,
 Being to compliment the Duke designed
 And bring the complimenter credit so, —
 Pleasure with profit happily combined.
 Thus René Gentilhomme rhymed, rhymed till —
 lo,
 This happened, as he sat in an alcove
 Elaborating rhyme for “love” — *not* “dove.” 240

XXXI

He was alone: silence and solitude
 Befit the votary of the Muse. Around,
 Nature — not our new picturesque and rude,
 But trim tree-cinctured stately garden-ground —
 Breathed polish and politeness. All-imbued
 With these, he sat absorbed in one profound
 Excogitation “Were it best to hint
 Or boldly boast ‘She loves me, — Araminte’?”

XXXII

When suddenly flashed lightning, searing sight
 Almost, so close to eyes; then, quick on flash, 250
 Followed the thunder, splitting earth downright
 Where René sat a-rhyming: with huge crash
 Of marble into atoms infinite —
 Marble which, stately, dared the world to dash
 The stone-thing proud, high-pillared, from its place:
 One flash, and dust was all that lay at base.

XXXIII

So, when the horrible confusion loosed
 Its wrappage round his senses, and, with breath,
 Seeing and hearing by degrees induced
 Conviction what he felt was life, not death — 260
 His fluttered faculties came back to roost
 One after one, as fowls do: ay, beneath,
 About his very feet there, lay in dust
 Earthly presumption paid by heaven's disgust.

XXXIV

For, what might be the thunder-smitten thing
 But, pillared high and proud, in marble guise,
 A ducal crown — which meant "Now Duke: Next,
 King"?
 Since such the Prince was, not in his own eyes
 Alone, but all the world's. Pebble from sling
 Prostrates a giant; so can pulverize 270
 Marble pretension — how much more, make moult
 A peacock-prince his plume — God's thunderbolt.

XXXV

That was enough for René, that first fact
 Thus flashed into him. Up he looked: all blue
 And bright the sky above; earth firm, compact
 Beneath his footing, lay apparent too;
 Opposite stood the pillar: nothing lacked
 There, but the Duke's crown: see, its fragments
 strew
 The earth, — about his feet lie atoms fine
 Where he sat nursing late his fourteenth line! 280

XXXVI

So, for the moment, all the universe
 Being abolished, all 'twixt God and him, —

Earth's praise or blame, its blessing or its curse,
 Of one and the same value, — to the brim
 Flooded with truth for better or for worse, —
 He pounces on the writing-paper, prim,
 Keeping its place on table: not a dint
 Nor speck had damaged "Ode to Araminte."

XXXVII

And over the neat crowquill calligraph
 His pen goes blotting, blurring, as an ox 290
 Tramples a flower-bed in a garden, — laugh
 You may! — so does not he, whose quick heart
 knocks
 Audibly at his breast: an epitaph
 On earth's break-up, amid the falling rocks,
 He might be penning in a wild dismay,
 Caught with his work half-done on Judgment Day.

XXXVIII

And what is it so terribly he pens,
 Ruining "Cupid, Venus, wile and smile,
 Hearts, darts," and all his day's *Divinior mens*
 Judged necessary to a perfect style? 300
 Little reck's René, with a breast to cleanse,
 Of Rhadamanthine law that reigned erewhile:
 Brimful of truth, truth's outburst will convince
 (Style or no style) who bears truth's brunt — the
 Prince.

XXXIX

"Condé, called 'Duke,' be called just 'Duke,' not
 more
 To life's end! 'Next King' thou forsooth wilt be?
 Ay, when this bauble, as it decked before
 Thy pillar, shall again, for France to see,

Take its proud station there! Let France adore
 No longer an illusive mock-sun — thee — 310
 But keep her homage for Sol's self, about
 To rise and put pretenders to the rout!

XL

“What? France so God-abandoned that her root
 Regal, though many a Spring it gave no sign,
 Lacks power to make the bole, now branchless, shoot
 Greenly as ever? Nature, though benign,
 Thwarts ever the ambitious and astute.

In store for such is punishment condign:
 Sure as thy Duke's crown to the earth was hurled,
 So sure, next year, a Dauphin glads the world!” 320

XLI

Which penned — some forty lines to this effect —
 Our René folds his paper, marches brave
 Back to the mansion, luminous, erect,
 Triumphant, an emancipated slave.
 There stands the Prince. “How now? My Duke's
 crown wrecked?”

What may this mean?” The answer René gave
 Was — handing him the verses, with the due
 Incline of body: “Sir, God's word to you!”

XLII

The Prince read, paled, was silent; all around,
 The courtier-company, to whom he passed 330
 The paper, read, in equal silence bound.

René grew also by degrees aghast
 At his own fit of courage — palely found
 Way of retreat from that pale presence: classed
 Once more among the cony-kind. “Oh, son,
 It is a feeble folk!” saith Solomon.

XLIII

Vainly he apprehended evil: since,
 When, at the year's end, even as foretold,
 Forth came the Dauphin who discrowned the Prince
 Of that long-craved mere visionary gold, 340
 'T was no fit time for envy to evince
 Malice, be sure! The timidest grew bold:
 Of all that courtier-company not one.
 But left the semblance for the actual sun.

XLIV

And all sorts and conditions that stood by
 At René's burning moment, bright escape
 Of soul, bore witness to the prophecy.
 Which witness took the customary shape
 Of verse; a score of poets in full cry 349
 Hailed the inspired one. Nantes and Tours agape,
 Soon Paris caught the infection; gaining strength,
 How could it fail to reach the Court at length?

XLV

"O poet!" smiled King Louis, "and besides,
 O prophet! Sure, by miracle announced,
 My babe will prove a prodigy. Who chides
 Henceforth the unchilded monarch shall be
 trounced
 For irreligion: since the fool derides
 Plain miracle by which this prophet pounced
 Exactly on the moment I should lift
 Like Simeon, in my arms, a babe, 'God's gift!' 360

XLVI

"So call the boy! and call this bard and seer
 By a new title! him I raise to rank
 Of 'Royal Poet:' poet without peer!
 Whose fellows only have themselves to thank

If humbly they must follow in the rear

My René. He's the master: they must clank
Their chains of song, confessed his slaves; for why?
They poetize, while he can prophesy!"

XLVII

So said, so done; our René rose august,

"The Royal Poet;" straightway put in type 370
His poem-prophecy, and (fair and just

Procedure) added, — now that time was ripe
For proving friends did well his word to trust, —

Those attestations, turned to lyre or pipe,
Which friends broke out with when he dared foretell
The Dauphin's birth: friends trusted, and did well.

XLVIII

Moreover he got painted by Du Pré,

Engraved by Daret also, and prefixed
The portrait to his book: a crown of bay 379

Circled his brows, with rose and myrtle mixed;
And Latin verses, lovely in their way,

Described him as "the biforked hill betwixt:
Since he hath scaled Parnassus at one jump,
Joining the Delphic quill and Getic trump."

XLIX

Whereof came . . . What, it lasts, our spirt, thus
long

— The red fire? That's the reason must excuse
My letting flicker René's prophet-song

No longer; for its pertinacious hues
Must fade before its fellow joins the throng

Of sparks departed up the chimney, dues 390
To dark oblivion. At the word, it winks,
Rallies, relapses, dwindles, deathward sinks!

L

So does our poet. All this burst of fame,
 Fury of favor, Royal Poetship,
 Prophetship, book, verse, picture — thereof came
 — Nothing! That 's why I would not let outstrip
 Red his green rival flamelet: just the same
 Ending in smoke waits both! In vain we rip
 The past, no further faintest trace remains
 Of René to reward our pious pains. 400

LI

Somebody saw a portrait framed and glazed
 At Croisic. "Who may be this glorified
 Mortal unheard-of hitherto?" amazed
 That person asked the owner by his side,
 Who proved as ignorant. The question raised
 Provoked inquiry; key by key was tried
 On Croisic's portrait-puzzle, till back flew
 The wards at one key's touch, which key was —
 Who?

LII

The other famous poet! Wait thy turn,
 Thou green, our red's competitor! Enough 410
 Just now to note 't was he that itched to learn
 (A hundred years ago) how fate could puff
 Heaven-high (a hundred years before) then spurn
 To suds so big a bubble in some huff:
 Since green too found red's portrait, — having heard
 Hitherto of red's rare self not one word.

LIII

And he with zeal addressed him to the task
 Of hunting out, by all and any means,
 — Who might the brilliant bard be, born to bask
 Butterfly-like in shine which kings and queens

And baby-dauphins shed? Much need to ask! 421
 Is fame so fickle that what perks and preens
 The eyed wing, one imperial minute, dips
 Next sudden moment into blind eclipse?

LIV

After a vast expenditure of pains,
 Our second poet found the prize he sought:
 Urged in his search by something that restrains
 From undue triumphfamed ones who have fought,
 Or simply, poetizing, taxed their brains:
 Something that tells such — dear is triumph
 bought 430
 If it means only basking in the midst
 Of fame's brief sunshine, as thou, René, didst.

LV

For, what did searching find at last but this?
 Quoth somebody "I somehow somewhere seem
 To think I heard one old De Chevaye is
 Or was possessed of René's works!" which gleam
 Of light from out the dark proved not amiss
 To track, by correspondence on the theme;
 And soon the twilight broadened into day,
 For thus to question answered De Chevaye. 440

LVI

"True it is, I did once possess the works
 You want account of — works — to call them so, —
 Comprised in one small book: the volume lurks
 (Some fifty leaves *in duodecimo*)
 'Neath certain ashes which my soul it irks
 Still to remember, because long ago
 That and my other rare shelf-occupants
 Perished by burning of my house at Nantes.

LVII

“Yet of that book one strange particular 449
 Still stays in mind with me” — and thereupon
 Followed the story. “Few the poems are;
 The book was two-thirds filled up with this one,
 And sundry witnesses from near and far
 That here at least was prophesying done
 By prophet, so as to preclude all doubt,
 Before the thing he prophesied about.”

LVIII

That's all he knew, and all the poet learned,
 And all that you and I are like to hear
 Of René; since not only book is burned
 But memory extinguished, — nay, I fear, 460
 Portrait is gone too: nowhere I discerned
 A trace of it at Croisic. “Must a tear
 Needs fall for that?” you smile. “How fortune
 fares
 With such a mediocrity, who cares?”

LIX

Well, I care — intimately care to have
 Experience how a human creature felt
 In after-life, who bore the burden grave
 Of certainly believing God had dealt
 For once directly with him: did not rave
 — A maniac, did not find his reason melt 470
 — An idiot, but went on, in peace or strife,
 The world's way, lived an ordinary life.

LX

How many problems that one fact would solve!
 An ordinary soul, no more, no less,
 About whose life earth's common sights revolve,
 On whom is brought to bear, by thunder-stress,

This fact — God tasks him, and will not absolve
 Task's negligent performer! Can you guess
 How such a soul, — the task performed to point, —
 Goes back to life nor finds things out of joint? 480

LXI

Does he stand stock-like henceforth? or proceed
 Dizzily, yet with course straightforward still,
 Down-trampling vulgar hindrance? — as the reed
 Is crushed beneath its tramp when that blind
 will
 Hatched in some old-world beast's brain bids it
 speed
 Where the sun wants brute-presence to fulfil
 Life's purpose in a new far zone, ere ice
 Enwomb the pasture-tract its fortalice.

LXII

I think no such direct plain truth consists
 With actual sense and thought and what they
 take 490
 To be the solid walls of life: mere mists —
 How such would, at that truth's first piercing,
 break
 Into the nullity they are! — slight lists
 Wherein the puppet-champions wage, for sake
 Of some mock-mistress, mimic war: laid low
 At trumpet-blast, there's shown the world, one foe!

LXIII

No, we must play the pageant out, observe
 The tourney-regulations, and regard
 Success — to meet the blunted spear nor swerve,
 Failure — to break no bones yet fall on sward; 500

Must prove we have — not courage? well then, —
nerve!

And, at the day's end, boast the crown's award —
Be warranted as promising to wield
Weapons, no sham, in a true battle-field.

LXIV

Meantime, our simulated thunderclaps
Which tell us counterfeited truths — these same
Are — sound, when music storms the soul, perhaps?
— Sight, beauty, every dart of every aim
That touches just, then seems, by strange relapse,
To fall effectless from the soul it came 510
As if to fix its own, but simply smote
And startled to vague beauty more remote?

LXV

So do we gain enough — yet not too much —
Acquaintance with that outer element
Whercin there's operation (call it such!)
Quite of another kind than we the pent
On earth are proper to receive. Our hutch
Lights up at the least chink: let roof be rent —
How inmates huddle, blinded at first spasm,
Cognizant of the sun's self through the chasm! 520

LXVI

Therefore, who knows if this our René's quick
Subsidence from as sudden noise and glare
Into oblivion was impolitic?
No doubt his soul became at once aware
That, after prophecy, the rhyming-trick
Is poor employment: human praises scare
Rather than soothe ears all a-tingle yet
With tones few hear and live, but none forget.

LXVII

There 's our first famous poet. Step thou forth 529
 Second consummate songster! See, the tongue
 Of fire that typifies thee, owns thy worth
 In yellow, purple mixed its green among,
 No pure and simple resin from the North,
 But composite with virtues that belong
 To Southern culture! Love not more than hate
 Helped to a blaze . . . But I anticipate.

LXVIII

Prepare to witness a combustion rich
 And riotously splendid, far beyond ·
 Poor René's lambent little streamer which
 Only played candle to a Court grown fond 540
 By baby-birth: this soared to such a pitch,
 Alternately such colors doffed and donned,
 That when I say it dazzled Paris — please
 Know that it brought Voltaire upon his knees!

LXIX

Who did it, was a dapper gentleman,
 Paul Desforges Maillard, Croisickese by birth,
 Whose birth that century ended which began
 By similar bestowment on our earth
 Of the aforesaid René. Cease to scan 549
 The ways of Providence! See Croisic's dearth —
 Not Paris in its plenitude — suffice
 To furnish France with her best poet twice!

LXX

Till he was thirty years of age, the vein
 Poetic yielded rhyme by drops and spirts:
 In verses of society had lain
 His talent chiefly; but the Muse asserts

Privilege most by treating with disdain
 Epics the bard mouths out, or odes he blurts
 Spasmodically forth. Have people time
 And patience nowadays for thought in rhyme? 560

LXXI

So, his achievements were the quatrain's inch
 Of homage, or at most the sonnet's ell
 Of admiration: welded lines with clinch
 Of ending word and word, to every belle
 In Croisic's bounds; these, brisk as any finch,
 He twittered till his fame had reached as well
 Guérande as Batz; but there fame stopped, for —
 curse
 On fortune — outside lay the universe!

LXXII

That's Paris. Well, — why not break bounds, and
 send
 Song onward till it echo at the gates 570
 Of Paris whither all ambitions tend,
 And end too, seeing that success there sates
 The soul which hungers most for fame? Why
 spend
 A minute in deciding, while, by Fate's
 Decree, there happens to be just the prize
 Proposed there, suiting souls that poetize?

LXXIII

A prize indeed, the Academy's own self
 Proposes to what bard shall best indite
 A piece describing how, through shoal and shelf,
 The Art of Navigation, steered aright, 580

Has, in our last king's reign, — the lucky elf, —
 Reached, one may say, Perfection's haven quite,
 And there cast anchor. At a glance one sees
 The subject's crowd of capabilities!

LXXIV

Neptune and Amphitrité! Thetis, who
 Is either Tethys or as good — both tag!
 Triton can shove along a vessel too:
 It's Virgil! Then the winds that blow or lag, —
 De Maille, Vendôme, Vermandois! Toulouse blew
 Longest, we reckon: he must puff the flag 590
 To fullest outflare; while our lacking nymph
 Be Anne of Austria, Regent o'er the lymph!

LXXV

Promised, performed! Since *irritabilis gens*
 Holds of the feverish impotence that strives
 To stay an itch by prompt resource to pen's
 Scratching itself on paper; placid lives,
 Leisurely works mark the *divinior mens*:
 Bees brood above the honey in their hives;
 Gnats are the busy bustlers. Splash and scrawl, —
 Completed lay thy piece, swift penman Paul! 600

LXXVI

To Paris with the product! This despatched,
 One had to wait the Forty's slow and sure
 Verdict, as best one might. Our penman scratched
 Away perforce the itch that knows no cure
 But daily paper-friction: more than matched
 His first feat by a second — tribute pure
 And heartfelt to the Forty when their voice
 Should peal with one accord "Be Paul our choice!"

LXXVII

Scratch, scratch went much laudation of that sane
 And sound Tribunal, delegates august 610
 Of Phœbus and the Muses' sacred train —
 Whom every poetaster tries to thrust
 From where high-throned, they dominate the Seine:
 Fruitless endeavor, — fail it shall and must!
 Whereof in witness have not one and all
 The Forty voices pealed "Our Choice be Paul"?

LXXVIII

Thus Paul discounted his applause. Alack
 For human expectation! Scarcely ink
 Was dry when, lo, the perfect piece came back
 Rejected, shamed! Some other poet's clink 620
 "Thetis and Tethys" had seduced the pack
 Of pedants to declare perfection's pink
 A singularly poor production. "Whew!
 The Forty are stark fools, I always knew."

LXXIX

First fury over (for Paul's race — to-wit,
 Brain-vibrios — wriggle clear of protoplasm
 Into minute life that's one fury-fit),
 "These fools shall find a bard's enthusiasm
 Comports with what should counterbalance it — 629
 Some knowledge of the world! No doubt, orgasm
 Effects the birth of verse which, born, demands
 Prosaic ministration, swaddling-bands!

LXXX

"Verse must be cared for at this early stage,
 Handled, nay dandled even. I should play
 Their game indeed if, till it grew of age,
 I meekly let these dotards frown away

My bantling from the rightful heritage
 Of smiles and kisses! Let the public say
 If it be worthy praises or rebukes,
 My poem, from these Forty old perukes!" 640

LXXXI

So, by a friend, who boasts himself in grace
 With no less than the Chevalier La Roque, —
 Eminent in those days for pride of place,
 Seeing he had it in his power to block
 The way or smooth the road to all the race
 Of literators trudging up to knock
 At Fame's exalted temple-door — for why?
 He edited the Paris "Mercury": —

LXXXII

By this friend's help the Chevalier receives
 Paul's poem, prefaced by the due appeal 650
 To Cæsar from the Jews. As duly heaves
 A sigh the Chevalier, about to deal
 With case so customary — turns the leaves,
 Finds nothing there to borrow, beg or steal —
 Then brightens up the critic's brow deep-lined.
 "The thing may be so cleverly declined!"

LXXXIII

Down to desk, out with paper, up with quill,
 Dip and indite! "Sir, gratitude immense
 For this true draught from the Pierian rill!
 Our Academic clodpoles must be dense 660
 Indeed to stand unirrigated still.
 No less, we critics dare not give offence
 To grandees like the Forty: while we mock
 We grin and bear. So, here's your piece! La
 Roque."

LXXXIV

“There now!” cries Paul: “the fellow can’t avoid
 Confessing that my piece deserves the palm;
 And yet he dares not grant me space enjoyed
 By every scribbler he permits embalm
 His crambo in the Journal’s corner! Cloyed
 With stuff like theirs, no wonder if a qualm 670
 Be caused by verse like mine: though that’s no cause
 For his defrauding me of just applause.

LXXXV

“Aha, he fears the Forty, this poltroon?
 First let him fear *me*! Change smooth speech to
 rough!
 I’ll speak my mind out, show the fellow soon
 Who is the foe to dread: insist enough
 On my own merits till, as clear as noon,
 He sees I am no man to take rebuff
 As patiently as scribblers may and must! 679
 Quick to the onslaught, out sword, cut and thrust!”

LXXXVI

And thereupon a fierce epistle flings
 Its challenge in the critic’s face. Alack!
 Our bard mistakes his man! The gauntlet rings
 On brazen visor proof against attack.
 Prompt from his editorial throne up springs
 The insulted magnate, and his mace falls, thwack,
 On Paul’s devoted brainpan, — quite away
 From common courtesies of fencing-play!

LXXXVII

“Sir, will you have the truth? This piece of yours
 Is simply execrable past belief. 690
 I shrank from saying so; but, since naught cures
 Conceit but truth, truth’s at your service! Brief,

Just so long as 'The Mercury' endures,
 So long are you excluded by its Chief
 From corner, nay, from cranny! Play the cock
 O'theroost, henceforth, at Croisic!" wrote La Roque.

LXXXVIII

Paul yellowed, whitened, as his wrath from red
 Waxed incandescent. Now, this man of rhyme
 Was merely foolish, faulty in the head
 Not heart of him: conceit's a venial crime. 700
 "Oh by no means malicious!" cousins said:
 Fussily feeble, — harmless all the time,
 Piddling at so-called satire — well-advised,
 He held in most awe whom he satirized.

LXXXIX

Accordingly his kith and kin — removed
 From emulation of the poet's gift
 By power and will — these rather liked, nay, loved
 The man who gave his family a lift
 Out of the Croisic level; "disapproved
 Satire so trenchant." Thus our poet sniffed 710
 Home-incense, though too churlish to unlock
 "The Mercury's" box of ointment was La Roque.

XC

But when Paul's visage grew from red to white,
 And from his lips a sort of mumbling fell
 Of who was to be kicked, — "And serve him right" —
 A gay voice interposed — "did kicking well
 Answer the purpose! Only — if I might
 Suggest as much — a far more potent spell
 Lies in another kind of treatment. Oh,
 Women are ready at resource, you know!

XCI

“Talent should minister to genius! Good:
 The proper and superior smile returns.
 Hear me with patience! Have you understood
 The only method whereby genius earns
 Fit guerdon nowadays? In knightly mood
 You entered lists with visor up: one learns
 Too late that, had you mounted Roland’s crest,
 ‘Room!’ they had roared — La Roque with all the
 rest!

XCII

“Why did you first of all transmit your piece
 To those same priggish Forty unprepared 730
 Whether to rank you with the swans or geese
 By friendly intervention? If they dared
 Count you a cackler, — wonders never cease!
 I think it still more wondrous that you bared
 Your brow (my earlier image) as if praise
 Were gained by simple fighting nowadays!

XCIII

“Your next step showed a touch of the true means
 Whereby desert is crowned: not force but wile
 Came to the rescue. ‘Get behind the scenes!’
 Your friend advised: he writes, sets forth your
 style 740
 And title, to such purpose intervenes
 That you get velvet-compliment three-pile;
 And, though ‘The Mercury’ said ‘nay,’ nor stock
 Nor stone did his refusal prove La Roque.

XCIV

“Why must you needs revert to the high hand,
 Imperative procedure — what you call

‘Taking on merit your exclusive stand’?

Stand, with a vengeance! Soon you went to wall,
You and your merit! Only fools command

When folk are free to disobey them, Paul! 750
You ’ve learnt your lesson, found out what ’s o’clock,
By this uncivil answer of La Roque.

XCV

“Now let me counsel! Lay this piece on shelf
— Masterpiece though it be! From out your
desk

Hand me some lighter sample, verse the elf
Cupid inspired you with, no god grotesque
Presiding o’er the Navy! I myself

Hand-write what ’s legible yet picturesque;
I ’ll copy fair and femininely frock
Your poem masculine that courts La Roque! 760

XCVI

“Deïdamia he — Achilles thou!

Ha, ha, these ancient stories come so apt!
My sex, my youth, my rank I next avow

In a neat prayer for kind perusal. Sapped
I see the walls which stand so stoutly now!

I see the toils about the game entrapped
By honest cunning! Chains of lady’s-smock,
Not thorn and thistle, tether fast La Roque!”

XCVII

Now, who might be the speaker sweet and arch 769

That laughed above Paul’s shoulder as it heaved
With the indignant heart? — bade steal a march
And not continue charging? Who conceived

This plan which set our Paul, like pea you parch
 On fire-shovel, skipping, of a load relieved,
 From arm-chair moodiness to escritoire
 Sacred to Phœbus and the tuneful choir?

XCVIII

Who but Paul's sister! named of course like him
 "Desforges"; but, mark you, in those days a queer
 Custom obtained, — who knows whence grew the
 whim? —

That people could not read their title clear 780
 To reverence till their own true names, made dim
 By daily mouthing, pleased to disappear,
 Replaced by brand-new bright ones: Arouet,
 For instance, grew Voltaire; Desforges — Malcraais.

XCIX

"Demoiselle Malcraais de la Vigne" — because
 The family possessed at Brederac
 A vineyard, — few grapes, many hips-and-haws, —
 Still a nice Breton name. As breast and back
 Of this vivacious beauty gleamed through gauze,
 So did her sprightly nature nowise lack 790
 Lustre when draped, the fashionable way,
 In "Malcraais de la Vigne" — more short, "Mal-
 crais."

C

Out from Paul's escritoire behold escape
 The hoarded treasure! verse falls thick and fast,
 Sonnets and songs of every size and shape,
 The lady ponders on her prize; at last
 Selects one which — Oh angel and yet ape! —
 Her malice thinks is probably surpassed
 In badness by no fellow of the flock,
 Copies it fair, and "Now for my La Roque!" 800

CI

So, to him goes, with the neat manuscript,
 The soft petitionary letter. "Grant
 A fledgeling novice that with wing unclipt
 She soar her little circuit, habitant
 Of an old manor; buried in which crypt,
 How can the youthful châtelaine but pant
 For disemprisonment by one *ad hoc*
 Appointed 'Mercury's' Editor, La Roque?"

CII

'T was an epistle that might move the Turk!
 More certainly it moved our middle-aged 810
 Pen-driver drudging at his weary work,
 Raked the old ashes up and disengaged
 The sparks of gallantry which always lurk
 Somehow in literary breasts, assuaged
 In no degree by compliments on style;
 Are Forty wagging beards worth one girl's smile?

CIII

In trips the lady's poem, takes its place
 Of honor in the gratified Gazette,
 With due acknowledgment of power and grace;
 Prognostication, too, that higher yet 820
 The Breton Muse will soar: fresh youth, high race,
 Beauty and wealth have amicably met
 That Demoiselle Malcrais may fill the chair
 Left vacant by the loss of Deshoulières.

CIV

"There!" cried the lively lady. "Who was right —
 You in the dumps, or I the merry maid
 Who know a trick or two can baffle spite
 Tenfold the force of this old fool's? Afraid

Of Editor La Roque? But come, next flight 829
 Shall outsoar — Deshoulières alone? My blade,
 Sappho herself shall you confess outstript!
 Quick, Paul, another dose of manuscript!"

CV

And so, once well a-foot, advance the game:
 More and more verses, corresponding gush
 On gush of praise, till everywhere acclaim
 Rose to the pitch of uproar. "Sappho? Tush!
 Sure 'Malcrais on her Parrot' puts to shame
 Deshoulières' pastoral, clay not worth a rush
 Beside this find of treasure, gold in crock, 839
 Unearthed in Brittany, — nay, ask La Roque!"

CVI

Such was the Paris tribute. "Yes," you sneer,
 "Ninnies stock Noodledom, but folk more sage
 Resist contagious folly, never fear!"
 Do they? Permit me to detach one page
 From the huge Album which from far and near
 Poetic praises blackened in a rage
 Of rapture! and that page shall be — who stares
 Confounded now, I ask you? — just Voltaire's!

CVII

Ay, sharpest shrewdest steel that ever stabbed
 To death Imposture through the armor-joints! 850
 How did it happen that gross Humbug grabbed
 Thy weapons, gouged thine eyes out? Fate ap-
 points
 That pride shall have a fall, or I had blabbed
 Hardly that Humbug, whom thy soul aroints,
 Could thus cross-buttock thee caught unawares,
 And dismalest of tumbles proved — Voltaire's!

CVIII

See his epistle extant yet, wherewith
 "Henri" in verse and "Charles" in prose he sent
 To do her suit and service! Here's the pith
 Of half a dozen stanzas — stones which went 860
 To build that simulated monolith —
 Sham love in due degree with homage blent
 As sham — which in the vast of volumes scares
 The traveller still: "That stucco-heap — Voltaire's?"

CIX

"Oh thou, whose clarion-voice has overflown
 The wilds to startle Paris that's one ear!
 Thou who such strange capacity hast shown
 For joining all that's grand with all that's dear,
 Knowledge with power to please — Deshoulières
 grown
 Learned as Dacier in thy person! mere 870
 Weak fruit of idle hours, these crabs of mine
 I dare lay at thy feet, O Muse divine!

CX

"Charles was my taskwork only; Henri trod
 My hero erst; and now, my heroine — she
 Shall be thyself! True — is it true, great God?
 Certainly love henceforward must not be!
 Yet all the crowd of Fine Arts fail — how odd! —
 Tried turn by turn, to fill a void in me!
 There's no replacing love with these, alas!
 Yet all I can I do to prove no ass. 880

CXI

"I labor to amuse my freedom; but
 Should any sweet young creature slavery preach,

And — borrowing thy vivacious charm, the slut! —
 Make me, in thy engaging words, a speech,
 Soon should I see myself in prison shut
 With all imaginable pleasure.” Reach
 The washhand-basin for admirers! There’s
 A stomach-moving tribute — and Voltaire’s!

CXII

Suppose it a fantastic billet-doux,
 Adulatory flourish, not worth frown! 890
 What say you to the Fathers of Trévoux?
 These in their Dictionary have her down
 Under the heading “Author”: “Malcrais, too,
 Is ‘Author’ of much verse that claims renown.”
 While Jean-Baptiste Rousseau . . . but why pro-
 ceed?
 Enough of this — something too much, indeed!

CXIII

At last La Roque, unwilling to be left
 Behindhand in the rivalry, broke bounds
 Of figurative passion; hilt and heft,
 Plunged his huge downright love through what 900
 surrounds
 The literary female bosom; reft
 Away its veil of coy reserve with “Zounds!
 I love thee, Breton Beauty! All’s no use!
 Body and soul I love, — the big word’s loose!”

CXIV

He’s greatest now and to de-struc-ti-on
Nearest. Attend the solemn word I quote,
 O Paul! *There’s no pause at per-fec-ti-on.*
 Thus knolls thy knell the Doctor’s bronzed throat!

Greatness a period hath, no sta-ti-on!

Better and truer verse none ever wrote 910
(Despite the antique outstretched *a-i-on*)
Than thou, revered and magisterial Donne!

CXV

Flat on his face, La Roque, and, — pressed to heart
His dexter hand, — Voltaire with bended knee!
Paul sat and sucked-in triumph; just apart
Leaned over him his sister. “Well!” smirks he,
And “Well?” she answers, smiling — woman’s art
To let a man’s own mouth, not hers, decree
What shall be next move which decides the game:
Success? She said so. Failure? His the blame. 920

CXVI

“Well!” this time forth affirmatively comes
With smack of lip, and long-drawn sigh through
teeth
Close clenched o’er satisfaction, as the gums
Were tickled by a sweetmeat teased beneath
Palate by lubricating tongue: “Well! crumbs
Of comfort these, undoubtedly! no death
Likely from famine at Fame’s feast! ’t is clear
I may put claim in for my pittance, Dear!

CXVII

“La Roque, Voltaire, my lovers! Then disguise
Has served its turn, grows idle; let it drop! 930
I shall to Paris, flaunt there in men’s eyes
My proper manly garb and mount a-top
The pedestal that waits me, take the prize
Awarded Hercules. He threw a sop
To Cerberus who let him pass, you know,
Then, following, licked his heels: exactly so!

CXVIII

“I like the prospect — their astonishment,
 Confusion: wounded vanity, no doubt,
 Mixed motives; how I see the brows quick bent!
 ‘What, sir, yourself, none other, brought about 940
 This change of estimation? Phœbus sent
 His shafts as from Diana?’ Critic pout
 Turns courtier smile: ‘Lo, him we took for her!
 Pleasant mistake! You bear no malice, sir?’

CXIX

“Eh, my Diana?” But Diana kept
 Smilingly silent with fixed needle-sharp
 Much-meaning eyes that seemed to intercept
 Paul’s very thoughts ere they had time to warp
 From earnest into sport the words they leapt 949
 To life with — changed as when maltreated harp
 Renders in tinkle what some player-prig
 Means for a grave tune though it proves a jig.

CXX

“What, Paul, and are my pains thus thrown away,
 My lessons end in loss?” at length fall slow
 The pitying syllables, her lips allay
 The satire of by keeping in full flow,
 Above their coral reef, bright smiles at play:
 “Can it be, Paul thus fails to rightly know
 And altogether estimate applause
 As just so many asinine hee-haws? 960

CXXI

“I thought to show you” . . . “Show me,” Paul
 in-broke,
 “My poetry is rubbish, and the world
 That rings with my renown a sorry joke!

What fairer test of worth than that, form furl'd,
I entered the arena? You yet croak

Just as if Phœbé and not Phœbus hurled
The dart and struck the Python! What, he crawls
Humbly in dust before your feet, not Paul's?

CXXII

"Nay, 't is no laughing matter though absurd

If there's an end of honesty on earth! 970

La Roque sends letters, lying every word!

Voltaire makes verse, and of himself makes mirth
To the remotest age! Rosseau's the third

Who, driven to despair amid such dearth
Of people that want praising, finds no one
More fit to praise than Paul the simpleton!

CXXIII

"Somebody says — if a man writes at all

It is to show the writer's kith and kin

He was unjustly thought a natural;

And truly, sister, I have yet to win 980

Your favorable word, it seems, for Paul

Whose poetry you count not worth a pin
Though well enough esteemed by these Voltaires,
Rousseaus and such like: let them quack, who cares?"

CXXIV

"— To Paris with you, Paul! Not one word's waste

Further: my scrupulosity was vain!

Go triumph! Be my foolish fears effaced

From memory's record! Go, to come again
With glory crowned, — by sister re-embraced,

Cured of that strange delusion of her brain 990
Which led her to suspect that Paris gloats
On male limbs mostly when in petticoats!"

CXXV

So laughed her last word, with the little touch
 Of malice proper to the outraged pride
 Of any artist in a work too much
 Shorn of its merits. "By all means be tried
 The opposite procedure! Cast your crutch
 Away, no longer crippled, nor divide
 The credit of your march to the World's Fair 999
 With sister Cherry-cheeks who helped you there!"

CXXVI

Crippled, forsooth! what courser sprightlier pranced
 Paris-ward than did Paul? Nay, dreams lent
 wings:
 He flew, or seemed to fly, by dreams entranced.
 Dreams? wide-awake realities: no things
 Dreamed merely were the missives that advanced
 The claim of Malcrais to consort with kings
 Crowned by Apollo — not to say with queens
 Cinctured by Venus for Idalian scenes.

CXXVII

Soon he arrives, forthwith is found before
 The outer gate of glory. Bold tic-toc 1010
 Announces there's a giant at the door.
 "Ay, sir, here dwells the Chevalier La Roque."
 "Lackey! Malcrais, — mind, no word less nor
 more! —

Desires his presence. I've unearthed the brock:
 Now, to transfix him!" There stands Paul erect,
 Inched out his uttermost, for more effect.

CXXVIII

A bustling entrance: "Idol of my flame!
 Can it be that my heart attains at last

Its longing? that you stand, the very same 1019
 As in my visions? . . . Ha! hey, how?" aghast
 Stops short the rapture. "Oh, my boy's to blame!
 You merely are the messenger! Too fast
 My fancy rushed to a conclusion. Pooh!
 Well, sir, the lady's substitute is — who?"

CXXIX

Then Paul's smirk grows inordinate. "Shake hands!
 Friendship not love awaits you, master mine,
 Though nor Malcrais nor any mistress stands
 To meet your ardor! So, you don't divine
 Who wrote the verses wherewith ring the land's
 Whole length and breadth? Just he whereof no
 line 1030
 Had ever leave to blot your Journal — eh?
 Paul Desforges Maillard — otherwise Malcrais!"

CXXX

And there the two stood, stare confronting smirk,
 Awhile uncertain which should yield the *pas*.
 In vain the Chevalier beat brain for quirk
 To help in this conjuncture; at length "Bah!
 Boh! Since I've made myself a fool, why shirk
 The punishment of folly? Ha, ha, ha,
 Let me return your handshake!" Comic sock 1039
 For tragic buskin prompt thus changed La Roque.

CXXXI

"I'm nobody — a wren-like journalist;
 You've flown at higher game and winged your
 bird,
 The golden eagle! That's the grand acquist!
 Voltaire's sly Muse, the tiger-cat, has purred

Prettily round your feet; but if she missed
 Priority of stroking, soon were stirred
 The dormant spit-fire. To Voltaire! away,
 Paul Desforges Maillard, otherwise Malcrais!"

CXXXII

Whereupon, arm in arm, and head in air,
 The two begin their journey. Need I say, 1050
 La Roque had felt the talon of Voltaire,
 Had a long-standing little debt to pay,
 And pounced, you may depend, on such a rare
 Occasion for its due discharge? So, gay
 And grenadier-like, marching to assault,
 They reach the enemy's abode, there halt.

CXXXIII

"I'll be announcer!" quoth La Roque: "I know,
 Better than you, perhaps, my Breton bard,
 How to procure an audience! He's not slow
 To smell a rat, this scamp Voltaire! Discard 1060
 The petticoats too soon, — you'll never show
 Your *haut-de-chausses* and all they've made or
 marred
 In your true person. Here's his servant. Pray,
 Will the great man see Demoiselle Malcrais?"

CXXXIV

Now, the great man was also, no whit less,
 The man of self-respect, — more great man he!
 And bowed to social usage, dressed the dress,
 And decorated to the fit degree
 His person; 't was enough to bear the stress
 Of battle in the field, without, when free 1070
 From outside foes, inviting friends' attack
 By — sword in hand? No, — ill-made coat on back!

CXXXV

And, since the announcement of his visitor
 Surprised him at his toilet, — never glass
 Had such solicitation! “Black, now — or
 Brown be the killing wig to wear? Alas,
 Where’s the rouge gone, this cheek were better for
 A tender touch of? Melted to a mass,
 All my pomatum! There’s at all events
 A devil — for he’s got among my scents!” 1080

CXXXVI

So, “barbered ten times o’er,” as Antony
 Paced to his Cleopatra, did at last
 Voltaire proceed to the fair presence: high
 In color, proud in port, as if a blast
 Of trumpet bade the world “Take note! draws nigh
 To Beauty, Power! Behold the Iconoclast,
 The Poet, the Philosopher, the Rod
 Of iron for imposture! Ah my God!”

CXXXVII

For there stands smirking Paul, and — what lights
 fierce
 The situation as with sulphur flash — 1090
 There grinning stands La Roque! No carte-and-
 tierce
 Observes the grinning fencer, but, full dash
 From breast to shoulderblade, the thrusts transpierce
 That armor against which so idly clash
 The swords of priests and pedants! Victors there,
 Two smirk and grin who have befooled — Voltaire!

CXXXVIII

A moment’s horror; then quick turn-about
 On high-heeled shoe, — flurry of ruffles, flounce

Of wig-ties and of coat-tails, — and so out 1099
 Of door banged wrathfully behind, goes — bounce —
 Voltaire in tragic exit! vows, no doubt,
 Vengeance upon the couple. Did he trounce
 Either, in point of fact? His anger's flash
 Subsided if a culprit craved his cash.

CXXXIX

As for La Roque, he having laughed his laugh
 To heart's content, — the joke defunct at
 once,
 Dead in the birth, you see, — its epitaph
 Was sober earnest. "Well, sir, for the nonce,
 You've gained the laurel; never hope to graff
 A second sprig of triumph there! Ensconce 1110
 Yourself again at Croisic: let it be
 Enough you mastered both Voltaire and — me!

CXL

"Don't linger here in Paris to parade
 Your victory, and have the very boys
 Point at you! 'There's the little mouse which
 made
 Believe those two big lions that its noise,
 Nibbling away behind the hedge, conveyed
 Intelligence that — portent which destroys
 All courage in the lion's heart, with horn
 That's fable — there lay couched the unicorn!' 1120

CXLI

"Beware us, now we've found who fooled us! Quick
 To cover! 'In proportion to men's fright,
 Expect their fright's revenge!' quoth politic
 Old Macchiavelli. As for me, — all's right:

I'm but a journalist. But no pin's prick
 The tooth leaves when Voltaire is roused to bite!
 So, keep your counsel, I advise! Adieu!
 Good journey! Ha, ha, ha, Malcrais was — you!"

CXLII

" — Yes, I'm Malcrais, and somebody beside, 1129
 You snickering monkey!" thus winds up the tale
 Our hero, safe at home, to that black-eyed
 Cherry-cheeked sister, as she soothes the pale
 Mortified poet. "Let their worst be tried,
 I'm their match henceforth — very man and male!
 Don't talk to me of knocking-under! man
 And male must end what petticoats began!

CXLIII

"How woman-like it is to apprehend
 The world will eat its words! why, words trans-
 fixed
 To stone, they stare at you in print, — at end, 1139
 Each writer's style and title! Choose betwixt
 Fool and knave for his name, who should intend
 To perpetrate a baseness so unmixed
 With prospect of advantage! What is writ
 Is writ: they've praised me, there's an end of it.

CXLIV

"No, Dear, allow me! I shall print these same
 Pieces, with no omitted line, as Paul's.
 Malcrais no longer, let me see folk blame
 What they — praised simply? — placed on pedes-
 tals,
 Each piece a statue in the House of Fame!

Fast will they stand there, though their presence
 galls 1150
 The envious crew: such show their teeth, perhaps,
 And snarl, but never bite! I know the chaps!"

CXLV

Oh Paul, oh piteously deluded! Pace
 Thy sad sterility of Croisic flats,
 Watch, from their southern edge, the foamy race
 Of high-tide as it heaves the drowning mats
 Of yellow-berried web-growth from their place,
 The rock-ridge, when, rolling as far as Batz,
 One broadside crashes on it, and the crags,
 That needle under, stream with weedy rags! 1160

CXLVI

Or, if thou wilt, at inland Bergerac,
 Rude heritage but recognized domain,
 Do as two here are doing: make hearth crack
 With logs until thy chimney roar again
 Jolly with fire-glow! Let its angle lack
 No grace of Cherry-cheeks thy sister, fain
 To do a sister's office and laugh smooth
 Thy corrugated brow — that scowls forsooth!

CXLVII

Wherefore? Who does not know how these La
 Roques, 1169
 Voltaires, can say and unsay, praise and blame,
 Prove black white, white black, play at paradox
 And, when they seem to lose it, win the game?
 Care not thou what this badger, and that fox,
 His fellow in rascality, call "fame!"

Fiddlepin's end! Thou hadst it, — quack, quack,
 quack!
 Have quietude from geese at Bergerac!

CXLVIII

Quietude! For, be very sure of this!
 A twelvemonth hence, and men shall know or care
 As much for what to-day they clap or hiss
 As for the fashion of the wigs they wear, 1180
 Then wonder at. There's fame which, bale or
 bliss, —
 Got by no gracious word of great Voltaire
 Or not-so-great La Roque, — is taken back
 By neither, any more than Bergerac!

CXLIX

Too true! or rather, true as ought to be!
 No more of Paul the man, Malcrais the maid,
 Thenceforth forever! One or two, I see,
 Stuck by their poet: who the longest stayed
 Was Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, and even he
 Seemingly saddened as perforce he paid 1190
 A rhyming tribute "After death, survive —
 He hoped he should; and died while yet alive!"

CL

No, he hoped nothing of the kind, or held
 His peace and died in silent good old age.
 Him it was, curiosity impelled
 To seek if there were extant still some page
 Of his great predecessor, rat who belled
 The cat once, and would never deign engage
 In after-combat with mere mice, — saved from
 More sonnetteering, — René Gentilhomme. 1200

CLI

Paul's story furnished forth that famous play
Or Piron's "Métromanie": there you'll find
He's Francaleu, while Demoiselle Malcrais
Is Demoiselle No-end-of-names-behind!
As for Voltaire, he's Damis. Good and gay
The plot and dialogue, and all's designed
To spite Voltaire: at "Something" such the laugh
Of simply "Nothing!" (see his epitaph).

CLII

But truth, truth, that's the gold! and all the good
I find in fancy is, it serves to set 1210
Gold's inmost glint free, gold which comes up rude
And rayless from the mine. All fume and fret
Of artistry beyond this point pursued
Brings out another sort of burnish: yet
Always the ingot has its very own
Value, a sparkle struck from truth alone.

CLIII

Now, take this sparkle and the other spirt
Of fitful flame, — twin births of our gray brand
That's sinking fast to ashes! I assert,
As sparkles want but fuel to expand 1220
Into a conflagration no mere squirt
Will quench too quickly, so might Croisic strand,
Had Fortune pleased posterity to chouse,
Boast of her brace of beacons luminous.

CLIV

Did earlier Agamemnons lack their bard?
But later bards lacked Agamemnon too!
How often frustrate they of fame's award
Just because Fortune, as she listed, blew

Some slight bark's sails to bellying, mauled and
marred 1229

And forced to put about the First-rate! True,
Such tacks but for a time: still — small-craft ride
At anchor, rot while Beddoes breasts the tide!

CLV

Dear, shall I tell you? There's a simple test
Would serve, when people take on them to
weigh

The worth of poets, "Who was better, best,
This, that, the other bard?" (bards none gainsay
As good, observe! no matter for the rest)

"What quality preponderating may
Turn the scale as it trembles?" End the strife
By asking "Which one led a happy life?" 1240

CLVI

If one did, over his antagonist
That yelled or shrieked or sobbed or wept or
wailed

Or simply had the dumps, — dispute who list, —
I count him victor. Where his fellow failed,
Mastered by his own means of might, — acquist
Of necessary sorrows, — he prevailed,
A strong since joyful man who stood distinct
Above slave-sorrows to his chariot linked.

CLVII

Was not his lot to feel more? What meant "feel"
Unless to suffer! Not, to see more? Sight — 1250
What helped it but to watch the drunken reel
Of vice and folly round him, left and right,

One dance of rogues and idiots! Not, to deal
 More with things lovely? What provoked the
 spite
 Of filth incarnate, like the poet's need
 Of other nutriment than strife and greed!

CLVIII

Who knows most, doubts most; entertaining hope,
 Means recognizing fear; the keener sense
 Of all comprised within our actual scope 1259
 Recoils from aught beyond earth's dim and dense.
 Who, grown familiar with the sky, will grope
 Henceforward among groundlings? That's of-
 fence
 Just as indubitably: stars abound
 O'erhead, but then — what flowers make glad the
 ground!

CLIX

So, force is sorrow, and each sorrow, force:
 What then? since Swiftness gives the charioteer
 The palm, his hope be in the vivid horse
 Whose neck God clothed with thunder, not the
 steer
 Sluggish and safe! Yoke Hatred, Crime, Remorse,
 Despair: but ever mid the whirling fear, 1270
 Let, through the tumult, break the poet's face
 Radiant, assured his wild slaves win the race!

CLX

Therefore I say . . . no, shall not say, but think,
 And save my breath for better purpose. White
 From gray our log has burned to: just one blink
 That quivers, loth to leave it, as a sprite

The outworn body. Ere your eyelids' wink
 Punish who sealed so deep into the night
 Your mouth up, for two poets dead so long, —
 Here pleads a live pretender: right your wrong! 1280

I

What a pretty tale you told me
 Once upon a time
 — Said you found it somewhere (scold me!)
 Was it prose or was it rhyme,
 Greek or Latin? Greek, you said,
 While your shoulder propped my head.

II

Anyhow there's no forgetting
 This much if no more,
 That a poet (pray, no petting!)
 Yes, a bard, sir, famed of yore, 10
 Went where suchlike used to go,
 Singing for a prize, you know.

III

Well, he had to sing, nor merely
 Sing but play the lyre;
 Playing was important clearly
 Quite as singing: I desire,
 Sir, you keep the fact in mind
 For a purpose that's behind.

IV

There stood he, while deep attention
 Held the judges round,

— Judges able, I should mention,
 To detect the slightest sound
 Sung or played amiss: such ears
 Had old judges, it appears!

V

None the less he sang out boldly,
 Played in time and tune,
 Till the judges, weighing coldly
 Each note's worth, seemed, late or soon,
 Sure to smile "In vain one tries
 Picking faults out: take the prize!" 30

VI

When, a mischief! Were they seven
 Strings the lyre possessed?
 Oh, and afterwards eleven,
 Thank you! Well, sir, — who had guessed
 Such ill luck in store? — it happed
 One of those same seven strings snapped.

VII

All was lost, then! No! a cricket
 (What "cicada"? Pooh!)
 -- Some mad thing that left its thicket
 For mere love of music — flew 40
 With its little heart on fire,
 Lighted on the crippled lyre.

VIII

So that when (ah joy!) our singer
 For his truant string
 Feels with disconcerted finger,
 What does cricket else but fling

Fiery heart forth, sound the note
Wanted by the throbbing throat?

IX

Ay and, ever to the ending,
Cricket chirps at need,
Executes the hand's intending,
Promptly, perfectly, — indeed
Saves the singer from defeat
With her chirrup low and sweet.

50

X

Till, at ending, all the judges
Cry with one assent
“Take the prize — a prize who grudges
Such a voice and instrument?
Why, we took your lyre for harp,
So it shrilled us forth F sharp!”

60

XI

Did the conqueror spurn the creature,
Once its service done?
That's no such uncommon feature
In the case when Music's son
Finds his Lotte's power too spent
For aiding soul-development.

XII

No! This other, on returning
Homeward, prize in hand,
Satisfied his bosom's yearning:
(Sir, I hope you understand!)
— Said “Some record there must be
Of this cricket's help to me!”

70

XIII

So, he made himself a statue:
Marble stood, life-size;
On the lyre, he pointed at you
Perched his partner in the prize;
Never more apart you found
Her, he throned, from him, she crowned.

XIV

That's the tale: its application?
Somebody I know
Hopes one day for reputation
Through his poetry that's — Oh,
All so learned and so wise
And deserving of a prize!

80

XV

If he gains one, will some ticket,
When his statue's built,
Tell the gazer "'T was a cricket
Helped my crippled lyre, whose lilt
Sweet and low, when strength usurped
Softness' place i' the scale, she chirped?

90

XVI

"For as victory was nighest,
While I sang and played, —
With my lyre at lowest, highest,
Right alike, — one string that made
'Love' sound soft was snapt in twain,
Never to be heard again, —

XVII

"Had not a kind cricket fluttered,
Perched upon the place

Vacant left, and duly uttered
‘Love, Love, Love,’ whene’er the bass 100
Asked the treble to atone
For its somewhat sombre drone.”

XVIII

But you don’t know music! Wherefore
Keep on casting pearls
To a — poet? All I care for
Is — to tell him that a girl’s
“Love” comes aptly in when gruff
Grows his singing. (There, enough!)

NOTES

RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY

Red Cotton Night-Cap Country. I. In this poem the poet tells the story to his friend, Miss Thackeray, whom he is supposed to have met on the beach at Saint-Rambert in Normandy. The conversation opens and continues for some time in a quizzical, bantering vein, which constantly awakens curiosity to be gratified later. Miss Thackeray having proposed the name "White Cotton Night-Cap Country," as appropriate to the drowsiness of the neighborhood, and intending to write a story with that title, the poet questions as to what especial kind of a night-cap she has in mind. She retorts by asking what other kind of night-cap could there be than night-caps pure and simple. Then the poet enlarges upon the fact that the ignorant might suppose a fiddle just a fiddle, but is n't there going on at that moment at Kensington a fiddle show in which there are being exhibited three hundred varieties, then why might there not be quite as remarkable a night-cap show? From this he goes on to enumerate the different kinds of night-caps he can think of, until he gets, by a series of associations, to a hangman and the French Revolution and a red cotton night-cap; then wonders whether there is any bit of life in this quiet neighborhood that could be symbolized by such a title. So gradually he leads up to the subject of the poem; at last, pointing out a church which had received as a gift two gold crowns for the Virgin and babe. The Virgin's crown was supplied by the Paris goldsmith Miranda, and here or nowhere he

will establish a night-cap gleam of visionary red in this White Night-Cap Country. Then he tells her of the prosperity of Miranda, who is his father's heir, and gives an account of his dwelling, Clairvaux, as they walk toward it to inspect it. Letting out the secret he has kept so far, that Miranda is dead, he humorously suggests various possibilities as giving rise to his statement that this is the veritable red night-cap spot in the neighborhood. His friend follows with others, all of which he declares far from the mark, till she says, "Not of the world your heroine?" This is the cue for him to describe the appearance of the heroine he had seen the day before, and to indulge in more suppositions as to the life of Miranda and his wife, which still do not reveal the "red." At this point the tantalizing poet doles out his "red" fact that Léonce Miranda met a tragic death.

II. Before going on to tell the whole story, the poet again digresses to introduce the simile of a ruin, and propound the question as to whether it should be left for time to demolish it or whether one should repair it, deciding that as soon as a ruin reaches the rubbish stage it should quickly be repaired, — and here was Miranda's weakness; he tried to walk straight through life with a ravage of opinions in his path. Now comes the story.

Miranda, of mixed Castilian and French blood, was grounded in his youth in a trusting sort of faith in the Church, which side of his nature, along with all the conventional ideas attendant upon it, Browning constantly symbolizes throughout the poem as "towers." The young man, however, discovers the possibilities in a life of pleasure, and this is symbolized as "turf." He is living his life of pleasure in a discreet and economical sort of way, when, one night at "The Varieties," he secs the woman with whom he falls in love, and loves with constancy for twenty years. She tells first a story of herself which is not true, and afterwards is obliged

to confess the truth that she is a tailor's run-away wife, and is living with a man who leaves her, when he discovers Miranda's visits, with a lot of tradesmen's bills which Miranda pays. Nothing, however, can make Miranda's love waver, and circumstances aid him to carry out his purposes. His father and brother die opportunely; he falls heir to all his father's wealth. Clara's husband, now become a fashionable tailor, turns up and desires to get rid of her legally, so that she cannot make any claim upon his property, and the law decrees them separation. Finally, his mother agrees to countenance somewhat their living together. So they retire to Clairvaux, as a legal marriage is impossible. The question here obtrudes itself upon the poet as to whether turf so protected by tents is not more stable than the far towers. Miranda converts his home into a little artistic Paris, where they live in Norman solitude, few people caring to be friendly with them.

III. His extravagances, however, cause remonstrances from his mother, which rouse his misgivings as to his way of living, and on leaving his mother in a feverish state of mind he plunges into the Seine. He is rescued, but has a dangerous illness through which Clara nurses him. Upon his recovery he is called suddenly to Paris to find his mother dead. His cousins, seeing a chance here to turn his fortune in their direction, make him believe that it is his manner of life which has killed his mother. These representations have the desired effect upon him. He makes arrangements to let them have his business and become his heirs, and decides to give up Clara; but just before completing arrangements he reads over her love-letters, and in a fit of remorse burns them and at the same time his own hands, with the idea that thus he may be purified. The cousins take things into their own hands, tell Clara he has given her up forever and that he has gone to Portugal. But as soon as he recovers from the illness following upon

the burning of his hands, he goes straight to Clara. The result is, he withdraws all the arrangements he was about to conclude for the benefit of the cousins, but sells them his business at a fair price, and again retires with Clara forever to Clairvaux. Since he feels the truth of his life with Clara, or the "turf" side of his existence, and the truth of the rules of the Church or "tower" side, he tries now to make them harmonize. The poet wishes some angel might have directed him to his friend Milsand for advice; but no angel did. So he goes to the Church; and the Church, after wrestling with him somewhat in regard to his way of life, finally concludes to wink at it in consideration of the "gifts" it will receive from him. Two years pass, in which he is most generous both to the Church and the poor, while he busies himself learning to do many things without his hands.

IV. At the end of these two years, one spring day, Miranda climbs the stairs to the Belvedere on his house, and as he gazes over the country and sees his church, La Ravissante, he falls to meditating, and experiences an exalted mood of faith, when, with the idea of wiping out all the evils of the past, giving a new start to faith in the world, and putting his Clara on a reputable footing, he suddenly determines to fly through the air to the Virgin lady of his faith, implicitly trusting her power to suspend the laws of gravitation and bear him to her. Such are the experiences which lead up to Miranda's tragic death. He was, of course, considered insane; but the poet counts him sane for having thus settled his wavering between two beliefs. On the strength of his supposed insanity, the cousins again try to secure Miranda's fortune, but Clara informs them he has left all to the Church, she only having a life interest; attempts to break the will fail, and the cousins are finally discomfited.

In summing up the two characters, the poet considers Miranda might have attained a better concep-

tion of life than he did, and is therefore more of a failure than Clara, who lived completely her nature as far as it went. She was not an aspiring soul, however, and incapable of great love, or she would have helped Miranda to find the truth, instead of accommodating herself to all his moods and basking in his kindness.

The story told in this poem is a drama of real life which took place partly in Paris, partly in Normandy. The only changes are in the names of the places and the people. As originally written, the true names were given; but Browning's friend, Lord Coleridge, advised him to change them, because he feared a case of libel might be brought against the poet. The particulars came to his notice while he was spending a part of the summer in Normandy in 1872. He has, of course, used the poet's prerogative in the developing of character and the interpretation of motives, though the conflict in the mind of the hero between his love and ultramontane Christianity is a part of the true history upon which the poem is based. The true names in the tragedy were later given to Mrs. Orr by Browning, and are as follows: —

I. 11. *The Firm-Miranda*: Mellerio Brothers.

41. *Saint-Rambert*: Saint-Aubin.

42. *Joyeux, Joyous-Gard*: Lion, Lionesse.

82. *Vire*: Caen.

362. *Saint-Rambertese*: Saint-Aubinese.

422. *Londres*: Douvres.

426. *London*: Dover.

427. *La Roche*: Courcelle.

428. *Monlieu*: Bernières.

430. *Villeneuve*: Langrune. — *Pons*: Luc.

432. *La Ravissante*: La Délivrande.

495. *Raimboux*: Bayeux.

499. *Morillon*: Hugonin.

506. *Mirecourt*: Bonnechose.

513. *Miranda*: Mellerio.

522. *New-York*: Madrid.

614. *Clairvaux*: TAILLEVILLE.
 638. *Gonthier*: BÉNY.
 643. *Rousseau*: VOLTAIRE.
 645. *Léonce*: ANTOINE.
 785. Of "*Firm-Miranda, London and New-York*";
 "Mellerio Brothers;" Meller, people say.
 II. 158. *Rare Vissante*: DELL YVRANDE.
 160. *Aldabert*: REGNOBERT.
 164. *Eldobert*: RAGNOBERT.
 174. *Mailleville*: BEAUDOIN.
 184. *Chaumont*: QUELEN.
 186. *Vertgalant*: TALLEYRAND.
 483. *Clara de Millefleurs*: ANNA DE BEAUPRÉ.
 489. *Coliseum Street*: MIROMESNIL STREET.
 629. *Steiner*: MAYER.
 630. *Commercy*: LAROCY. — *Sierck*: METZ.
 637. *Muhlhausen*: DEBACKER.
 661. *Carlino Centofanti*: MIRANDA DI MONGINO.
 800. *Portugal*: ITALY.
 1017. *Vaillant*: MÉRIEL.
 III. 87. *Thirty-three*: TWENTY-FIVE.
 117. *Beaumont*: PASQUIER.
 344. *Sceaux*: GARGES.
 889. *Luc de la Maison Rouge*: JEAN DE LA BECQUETIÈRE.
 890. *Claise*: VIRE.
 891. *Maude*: ANNE.
 913. *Dionysius*: ELIEZER.
 916. *Scolastica*: ELIZABETH.
 IV. 2. *Twentieth*: THIRTEENTH.
 368. *Fricquot*: PICOT.
 I. 9. *Place Vendôme*: a square in Paris.
 10. *Golconda*: a fortress in Hindostan, proverbially famous for diamond mines popularly thought to be in the vicinity, but the diamonds are merely cut and polished there.
 20. *Un-Murrayed*: not mentioned in Murray's famous guide-book. There are a number of small watering-places on the coast of Normandy which may

be found described in Henry Blaekburn's "Normandy Picturesque." Katherine S. Maequoid's "Through Normandy" also mentions some of these smaller places.

36. *Vàrech*: same as kelp, a kind of sea-weed.

42. *Joyous-Gard*: same as Lionesse, the estate given by King Arthur to Laneelot as a reward for defending Guinevere.

72. *Corso*: the principal street in Rome.

134. *The Emperor*: Napoleon III.

257. *Guarnerius*: Andreas, and his son Giuseppe were early Italian violin-makers. — *Straduarius*: Antonio, was a famous violin-maker of Cremona (1649–1737).

267. *Corelli*: a celebrated violin-player and composer.

268. *Grieving, by minors, like the cushat-dove*: the cushat-dove is the ring-dove or wood-pigeon.

269. *Giga*: or *gigue*, an old Italian dance, derives its name from the giga, or early fiddle. The tempo was lively; and it was frequently used to end a suite. One of Corelli's suites ends with a giga. — *Saraband*: a stately dance in 3–2 or 3–4 time. Corelli also wrote sarabands.

282. *Pope*: English poet (1688–1744).

287. *Voltaire*: the assumed name of François Marie Arouet, the French poet, historian, and philosopher, and most celebrated writer of the last century. He was in the habit of wearing a velvet cap (1694–1778). — *Hogarth*: William (1697–1764), the celebrated English artist who mercilessly satirized society in his drawings. He is represented with a cap on in his portraits.

291. *Cowper*: English poet (1731–1800), who is also represented in portraits with a cap.

308. *Louis*: XVI. of France, deposed by the Revolution of 1792 and beheaded.

313. *Phrygian symbol*: Phrygian cap is a figurative expression for the cap of freedom. The French Revolutionists called their cap the *bonnet-rouge*. It is said

to have been shaped like the caps the ancient Phrygians wore.

324. *The Corsican lieutenant*: Napoleon I.

327. *Canaille*: from the Italian *Canaglia*; literally, dogs, a term of scorn for the populace.

337. *Quod semel, semper, et ubique*: what was once, and is always and everywhere.

356. *Rahab-thread*: Joshua ii. 18.

364. *Octroi*: a tax levied at the gates of Continental cities on articles of food, etc.

406. *Liebig*: Justus, Baron von, a distinguished German chemist (born 1803).

425. *The Conqueror's country*: Normandy, the land of William the Conqueror.

432. *Ravissante*: Browning's name for the famous pilgrimage Church of Notre Dame de la Délivrande at Douvres. It was first built in the twelfth century, but nothing of the old building is left except some of the work in the north and west arcades. There is an interesting legend about the image of Notre Dame in the chapel, which tells how it was buried for two hundred years until the beginning of the eleventh century, and was then discovered through the strange actions of a ram. This ram used to leave its flock, and run to a place near the pasture, where it dug with its feet and horns, and when tired lay down in the hole. As this ram never ate and was the fattest of the flock, the reigning count supposed there must be something miraculous connected with it; so, accompanied by a holy hermit, the nobility and great crowds of people gathered at the spot, and dug in the trench made by the ram, and discovered an image of the Virgin. It was set up in the church with great pomp and ceremony, but was carried back to the old spot by an angel, by which sign the count knew he was to build a chapel for it there. Notre-Dame de la Délivrande was famous for its miraculous cures, and is still a favorite shrine for pilgrims.

438. *Lourdes and La Salette*: famous places of pilgrimage in France.

464. *Alessandro Sforza*: a duke of Milan in 1450.

492. *Martinique*: the most northerly of the Caribbee Islands, in the West Indies, belonging to France, which evidently has a church named after the one in Douvres.

506. *Cardinal Mirecourt*: Bonnechose, French Archbishop, Cardinal, and Senator, supporter of the temporal power of the Popes, opposed to Italian unity and freedom of expression.

545. *Abaris*: a priest of Apollo, who rode through the air invisible, on a golden arrow, curing diseases and giving oracles as he went.

595. *With diamond-necklace-dealing*: among Carlyle's essays will be found one which tells of the famous diamond necklace case in Paris.

610. *Lucarnes*: or lucaynes, dormer windows.

615. *Abbey-for-the-Males*: Abbaye aux Hommes, a fine old abbey in Caen; built by William the Conqueror. He was buried in the Church of Saint-Étienne; but his tomb, which was marked by a costly monument placed there by his sons Rufus and Henry was destroyed by the Calvinists and his bones scattered among the ruins. In 1642 the bones were collected and re-interred under a simple monument, but at the outbreak of the Revolution this was destroyed, and later the grave was again rifled. A slab with an inscription now marks the spot.

632. *Madrilene*: from Madrid.

714. *Élysées*: refers to the fine Paris street, the Champs Élysées. — *De Boulogne*: refers to the fine Paris park, Bois de Boulogne.

1006. *Cul-de-sac*: literally, bottom of a bag, used of any one hemmed in with no outlet except in front.

II. 67. *Father Secchi*: a celebrated Jesuit astronomer who lived in Rome.

87. *Idalian shape*: pertaining to Venus; after Idalia, an ancient town sacred to Venus.

88. *Victrix*: victress.

172. *An egregious sheep*: see note I. 432.

184. *Archbishop Chaumont*: Quelen, a French prelate, Archbishop of Paris in 1821 (1778–1839).

186. *Vertgalant*: Talleyrand (1754–1838). An accident in early life compelled him to go into the Church, but, being called upon in virtue of his office as Archbishop of Autun to take his seat in the États Généraux, scope was given him for the development of his talents as a statesman, and his name became illustrious through all Europe for thirty-five years.

204. *Rabelais*: a celebrated French wit and satirist (1483–1553).

215. *Acromia*: the outer extremities of the shoulder-blades.

231. *Sganarelle*: the name of the hero in Molière's comedy "Le Mariage Forcé."

278. *Caen*: an ancient and interesting city in Normandy.

289. *Inveni ovem [meam] quæ perierat*: I have found my sheep which was lost. St. Luke xv. 6.

596. *Favonian Breeze*: the western, favorable breeze.

597. *Auster*: south wind and unfavorable.

609. *A chicken threatened with the pip*: pip is a disease of fowls consisting of a secretion of mucus in the mouth and throat.

613. *Haschisch*: made from the tops and tender parts of Indian hemp. It is a strong narcotic.

1090. *L'Ingegno*: the genius.

1099. *Sieur Boileau*: French poet and satirist (1636–1711).

1101. *Louis Quatorze*: Louis XIV., King of France from 1643 to 1715.

1102. *Pierre Corneille*: called "the Great" by his admiring contemporaries, the most brilliant dramatist of the time of Louis XIV. (1606–1684).

III. 38. *Sardanapalus*: a prince of Assyria, celebrated

for his luxuriant and extravagant habits. The date of his reign is placed about 836-817 B. C.

491. *Religio Medici*: "Religion of a Doctor;" the title of a book by Sir Thomas Browne.

742. *Rouher*: Eugene, a French politician under Napoleon III.

744. *Œcumenical Assemblage*: a council of the bishops of the whole Church, presided over by the Pope or delegates of the Pope. Browning probably had in mind the great assemblage of 1870, when the infallibility of the Pope was discussed and passed by a large vote.

781. *Milsand*: Joseph, a friend of Browning's, who spent his summers in Saint-Aubin.

875. *Fons et origo*: the fount and origin.

901. *On Christmas morn . . . three Masses*: the first Mass is celebrated at midnight, the second at dawn, and the third on Christmas morning.

904. *Cistercian monk*: this religious order was established in 1098 by Robert, abbot of Moleuse, and was named from the forest of Citeaux, near Dijon, where the first convent was situated.

913. *Capucin*: a monk of the order of Saint Francis.

915. *Benedict*: the founder of the order of Benedictine Monks. He was born in Nursia about 480, and became so great a power that he was able to build twelve monasteries.

916. *Scolastica*: this was the name of Benedict's sister, who established a convent near Monte Cassino.

1000. *Star of Sea*: *Stella Maris*, one of the names of the Virgin.

1048. *Bach*: a celebrated composer of the classic school of German music. The poet evidently has in mind a fugue, as that would be the best form of music to try with a piano "pedal-keyed."

1069. *April, 'Seventy, — folly's year in France*: this was the year that war was declared by France against Germany because of the proposition to put a Prussian prince upon the Spanish throne. The French were

utterly defeated, Napoleon III. taken prisoner, and Paris besieged.

IV. 15. *Ollivier*: Émile, Prime Minister of France, was responsible for the declaration of war against Prussia in 1870, and at the first news of the Prussian invasion his ministry fell. — *Roon*: Von, a Prussian general at this time, who rendered important services in the reorganization of the army (1803–1879).

16. *Bismarck*: Prime Minister of Germany at the time of the Franco-Prussian war.

179. *Here came Louis Onze*: Louis XI., King of France, is said to have gone on a pilgrimage to La Délivrande on the fourteenth of August, 1493.

183. *I do not read it in Commines*: the more correct way of spelling it is "Comines." He is called "the father of Modern History." His Memoirs cover the reigns of Louis XI. and Charles VIII. He does not speak of this pilgrimage of Louis XI.

184. *Marie-Antoinette*: wife of Louis XVI. of France. No record of her pilgrimage to La Délivrande is given in the usual biographies of her.

197. *Count of Chambord*: head of the older branch of the royal house of Bourbon, and properly heir to Louis XVIII. There was great rejoicing among the Royalists at his birth, and he was called a "child of miracle." In spite of all this he was never for some reason brought forward as a candidate to the French throne. It is recorded that his mother, the Duchess of Berry, made a pilgrimage of thanksgiving to the shrine of Our Lady of Liesse after his baptism. Perhaps Browning had this in mind.

295. *Give the Legations to the Pope once more*: the Legations were the population of the provinces of the Pontifical dominions. The final blow to the temporal power of the Pope was given when the last of his temporal kingdom, Rome, was taken away from him in October, 1870, when by vote of the people they became the subjects of the King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel.

299. *And Henry, the Desired One*: the Count de Chambord, who was one of the aspirants to the French throne, and whose family had been deposed about twenty years before in 1848, upon the inauguration of the second Republic.

415. *Velleity*: a desire so weak that it does not urge toward the attainment of the object.

427. *Lignum vitæ*: Guaiacum wood, used medically. — *Grains of Paradise*: an aromatic drug.

429. *The rose of Jericho*: belongs to the order Cruciferae. It grows on the sandy deserts of Arabia, on rubbish, roofs of houses, and other such situations. A small plant, six inches high, with small white flowers. After flowering, the leaves fall off, and the branches curve inward toward the centre, so that it looks like a little globe. In this shape it is blown about, and if it falls into the water the branches open out again, the pods open and let out the seeds. This property gave rise to a superstitious regard for it. Tradition affirms that when Joseph and Mary were taking their flight into Egypt, one of these flowers sprang up to mark every spot where they rested; hence it is called Saint Mary's rose.

430. *Holy-thorn*: several plants from which Christ's crown of thorns is supposed to have been made are called "holy-thorn." Among them are the holly, the white-thorn, and the black-thorn. Whichever is so considered, is supposed to have many virtues, and is used as a divining rod and for the cure of many diseases. — *Passion-flower*: so called because regarded as a symbol of Christ's passion. The five anthers resemble the five wounds received by Christ when nailed to the cross; the three-parted style, the three nails which pierced each hand and his feet. The pillar of the cross is seen in the central receptacle; the crown of thorns in the filaments; the nimbus, which surrounds the sacred head, in the calyx.

437. *Monkshood*: aconite, a poisonous plant used for

medicinal purposes. — *Belladonna*: so named because anciently supposed to be the form of an enchantress, a poisonous plant used in medicine.

727. *Queen of the Camellias*: “*La Dame aux Camélias*,” a celebrated work by Alexandre Dumas.

771. *Miranda* . . . presents a *Blake*: Blake’s art is somewhat crude and unfinished in technique.

772. *Be Clara* — *Meissonier*: Meissonier is celebrated for the delicate finish of his work.

780. *Michelagnolo*: same as Michael Angelo, the great Italian painter, whose work stands for strength and grandeur (1475–1564).

787. *Painted-peacock*: a butterfly, the scientific name of which is *Vanessa*.

788. *Brimstone-wing*: a butterfly, so called on account of its bright yellow color. Its scientific name is the *Gonopteryx Rhamni*.

THE INN ALBUM

The Inn Album is a little character-drama in narrative form, its descriptive bits serving, however, merely as stage directions and scene-setting for the dialogue, which is carried on by two men and two women whose lives and loves are tragically interwoven.

As the poem opens, the elder man is casting up in the margin of the *Inn Album*, at daybreak, the amount he has lost in the night’s gambling. He had been expecting to fleece his rich young protégé on this his last chance at his purse before he settles down, at his advice, and marries his cousin of the “Place” near by. The youth had expected the same result from this farewell game, and lent himself willingly to it, the plan being that he is to feign arrival at the railway-station that morning at the same time that his friend leaves it. The warm-hearted young millionaire now presses the penniless noble to let the loss go. It may stand as an acknowledgment of his tutelage of him ever since

he had found him mooning over a love-disappointment, and saved him from moping his life away. This offer the *roué* is too wary to accept, and as he prepares to depart, they decide to walk to the station.

II. On their way the boy overflows with humble and affectionate admiration of his noble friend, and wonders how with such coolness and ability his tutor in worldliness has never become either rich, great, or happy. The elder finally confides his conviction that his ill-luck for the past four years is the curse attending a certain love-adventure. He had then crowned his long list of conquests with the love of the most beautiful girl he had ever deceived. Her nature, however, was of so strong and exalted a kind that just the genuineness which led her to trust him wholly turned her inflexible when he himself revealed the malicious deceit that had animated him, and the offer of marriage her scorn had stung him into making was contemptuously rejected. Various coincidences cause both men to suspect that their past lives have circled about the same woman, but one circumstance of misinformation prevents this from being made clear.

While they exchange confidences the train rolls by. The youth seizes the occasion, now that they have missed the train, to declare that he will go and tell his aunt the truth about his passing the night before at the Inn, and do his best to prevail upon her to receive his friend, in spite of his unsavory reputation as a profligate.

III. Meantime, two women arrive at the Inn which the two men have left, the cousin and a former school friend, whom she has begged to leave her four years' secluded happiness of married life in order to come to her. She trembles lest her approaching marriage be less good than it seems to promise, and she would fain rest upon her trusted friend's judgment of her cousin ere she gives him her decision. Her constant assumption in their talk together that her friend's marriage is

blissful, forces from the other a revelation of its loathsome dreariness. She then urges the dismayed girl to let her return at once to her rigid seclusion which she has broken with misgiving through her love for her. She will stay at the Inn till the other returns thither with the youth. Later he will accompany her to the train, and she can afterwards write all that her riper insight may be able to divine of his character.

IV. The elder woman, left alone to her musing, is suddenly aroused by the entrance of the elder man, who returns to the Inn to await the issue of the youth's diploma with his aunt. The two face each other. Unmitigated horror and hatred of her old lover's base nature fills her. Blame of her as his evil genius is mixed in him with curiosity as to her marriage and the awakening desire to retrieve his luck by getting control of her again. From the spiritual ruin that threatened her when his unworthiness was clear to her she saved herself by the might of her contempt for the baseness of marriage with a soul found base; but, instead of the sympathetic, gently soothing refuge of a sorrowing Magdalen which he supposes her present marriage to be, she lets him know that her yoke — self-sought, for work's sake, with a narrow-minded minister whose whole notion of this life is the duty of preaching damnation in the next — is a barren waste, utterly repugnant to her sensitive æsthetic sense and broad-minded character.

Then he pleads with her to flee with him where they may renew their lost love and repair their squandered opportunities. She listens, judges him to be again ensnaring the soul that had once torn itself away, reminds him of her husband's trust in her also, and so dooms him to his fate.

V. While he is on his knees before her, the youth returns from his unsuccessful mission. Recognizing in her the woman who had refused him because her love was not her own to give, he suspects some trick be-

tween the two; but her wise and patient friendliness and genuineness soon impress themselves upon him, and her old influence over him returns.

The older man, perceiving this, and ascertaining that she has never told her husband of her past, determines to turn both of these things, — the youth's revived love, the woman's secret, to his private advantage. He must have a word with the youth, before he leaves, he says, while she reads over in private, before returning to the Inn parlor, a message which he proceeds to write in the album.

VI. Alone with the youth, his plot at one stroke to avenge himself and pay his debt unfolds. He tells his young friend that his crowning lesson, for which the discharge of his gaming losses shall be the fee, is now to be given. Man he has taught him before. Woman is now to be disclosed. Putting his own sinister construction on their past love for the same woman and on her present life, he assures the youth that he will find her completely at his disposal if he is only man enough to take advantage of her forthwith; the proof of his words being that she will not gainsay his worst proposition on her return. Breaking off at the lady's re-entrance, he leaves them together, promising to return soon for thanks and good-by.

VII. She turns towards the perplexed youth with absolute composure; asks him if all has been told him; intimates that she now learns her fault in concealing her past, although she cannot account herself blameworthy; and then inquires how he can excuse himself for consorting with so base a man? Her loftiness and purity of soul shine out so unmistakably in her review of their talk of four years earlier when she had refused him, that the young man breaks out in a burst of loyalty and homage to his old love. He does not understand, cannot know what the elder man has written in the album, which seems to have some power over her, but he trusts her utterly and offers her his

heart and hand to prove as she may choose. She reaches for his hand as the elder man re-enters, and when he sneers, "So, you accept him?" replies, "Till Death us do part." But she interrupts his triumphant tirade to make the youth read the album inscription. It is a threat to tell her husband of her past unless she yield herself to the youth.

She has guessed that the youth is above joining in such a pact, and she now justifies herself to him for using the poison with which she has provided herself, as the only way open to her to stop the mouth of her old adversary. In a flash he is at the man's throat, and he lies dead.

VIII. That was one other way to stop his venom. But for the dying woman who has saved the boy from the corruption of the man and called out his better nature, nothing remains to do on earth but to add to the Inn album a last word acquitting him by declaring that her death was due to the villain from whom he righteously defended her.

As she dies, the pure, happy voice of the young girl returning to the Inn is heard outside.

The story is based on an actual occurrence in the life of Lord de Ros (1792-1839), a friend of the Duke of Wellington, the real facts being worse than the incidents of the poem, according to Dr. F. J. Furnivall, who, without mentioning names, says in "Notes and Queries," March 25, 1876, that the gambling lord showed the portrait of the lady he had seduced and abandoned, and offered his dupe an introduction to her, as a bribe to induce him to wait for payment of the money he had won; that the young gambler eagerly accepted the offer; and that the lady committed suicide on learning of the bargain between them. Dr. Furnivall states that he gets these details "from one who well remembers the circumstances and the sensation it made in London over thirty years ago." There is frequent passing reference to the original of the elder

man, Lord de Ros, in the "Gréville Memoirs." One of these is pertinent: "Dec. 3d, 1829 . . . I went to see Glengall's play again . . . Henry de Ros, Glengall, and I . . . I was very much amused (but did not venture to show it) at a point in one of the scenes between Lureall and Sir S. Foster: the latter said, 'Let me tell you, sir, that a country gentleman residing on his estate is as valuable a member of Society as a man of fashion in London, who lives by plundering those who have more money and less wit than himself;' when De Ros turned to Glengall and said, 'Richard, there seems to me to be a great deal of twaddle in this play.' "

I. 23. *Ecarté*: a French betting game. — *Blind Hookey*: a favorite game with card-sharpers.

24. *Cutting-the-Pack*: another gambling game, subject to clever sleight-of-hand occurrences. See also line 556.

35. *Sir Edwin's dripping stag; his couchant coast-guard creature*: popular companion pictures of deer by the famous animal painter, Sir Edwin Landseer, R. A. (1802–1852), the originals of which are at the Brompton Museum.

37. *The Huguenot*: one of the most familiar of the popular pictures of Sir John Millais (1829–1896). — *Light o' the World*: a symbolical picture of Christ by Holman Hunt (born in 1827), like Millais a well-known British artist of the modern pre-Raphaelite group.

39. *Salmo ferox*: the scientific name for the salmon, a painting of which is one of the wall decorations of the Inn. See line 84, also.

77. *Corot*: J. B. C. (1795–1875), the French painter, whose manner of painting is famous for its soft and dreamy effects.

108. *Ask Colenso else*: Bishop Colenso, whose scrutiny of the chronology of the Bible in his work on the Pentateuch (1862) brought discrepancies to light which give point to the supposition here that a man

so good at figures could find no error in this sum-total.

164. *The Salon*: where the pictures of the year in Paris are exhibited.

165. *Chantilly*: where the French races are run.

194. *A Pisgah-view*: Deuteronomy xxxiv. 1-4.

302. *As Ruskin should direct me*: John (born 1819), whose philanthropic faculty is as well known as his criticism of art. He inherited a million from his father, and administered it as if it were a trust fund, retaining but a small part for his own living expenses.

305. *Timon*: the typical misanthrope whom Shakespeare has represented in his "Timon of Athens."

327. *At Alfred's and not Istria*: Alfred's being an aristocratic club in London, established in Albermarle Street in 1808, and dissolved about the middle of the century; Istria, the notorious foreign gambling-place.

353. *Galopin*: a race-horse. — *That Gainsborough*: a picture by Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788), the landscape-painter.

393. *Correggio's long-lost Leda*: Antonio Allegri (1494-1534), called Correggio from the town in which he was born. Two of his pictures were purchased by the British government in 1834 for £10,000; his "Leda" is in the Berlin Museum.

II. 29. *Unlimited Loo*: differs from limited loo in its expeditious losses, any player failing must double the pool; and a player at 25 cent loo has been known to lose \$320 in three consecutive deals.

37. *Gladstone, Carlyle, the Laureate*: the most talked-of contemporaries three in statesmanship, prose, and poetry, respectively, that the young man could think of; but now, at date of this edition, the death as well as birth of all three can be recorded: Gladstone, W. E. (1809-1898), Carlyle, Thomas (1795-1881), Tennyson, Alfred (1809-1892).

81. *Dizzy*: D'Israeli, Benjamin (1804-1881), at the time of the poem rapidly rising into prominence, hav-

ing been recognized as the head of the Tory Party in 1841, and made Premier in 1868.

169. *Ess or Psidium*: scents.

203. *Leporello-list*: the list of the hero's conquests according to the old Don Juan story, and as sung by his valet Leporello in Mozart's opera of "Don Giovanni."

340. *Magdalen's adventure*: Luke xvi. 9.

427. *Something in "Don Quixote" to the point*: "Don Quixote," chap. xlvii.

III. 164. *Raff*: Joachim (1822-1882), musical composer.

165. *Czerny*: Karl (1791-1857), mainly known for his piano exercises in *technique*.

167. *Trollope's novels*: stories of modern life by Anthony Trollope (1815-1882), numerous and extremely popular at the date of the poem.

IV. 160. *In petto*: privately, a reservation made to oneself without saying anything about it.

414. *Dickens . . . Bach and Brahms*: indicative of the special tastes of the two, the husband's utmost artistic dissipation being the novels of Charles Dickens (1812-1870), treating of the life of the masses; while her range in music included "father" Bach, J. S. (1685-1750), and Brahms, Johannes (1833-1897), one of the most subtle artists in music among present-day composers.

686. *Bismarck*: Otto, born 1814, whose diplomacy, directed towards the unification and aggrandizement of Germany, was uppermost at the time of the poem, *i. e.*, about the middle of the present century.

V. 51. *Salvini*: Tommaso (born in 1830), the famous Italian actor of Othello and other Shakespearian parts.

59. *Bit of Latin that assures "Art means," etc.*: "Ars est celare artem."

VII. 248. *Duffel*: coarse gray woollen or frieze cloth.

251. *Spring-time, that's the ring-time*: from song in

"As You Like It," v. iii. 20, — "In the spring time, the only pretty ring time."

258. *Christ Church*: the famous college at Oxford which was founded by Cardinal Wolsey.

381. *Ne trucidet coram populo juvenis senem*: an ironical twisting to suit the poem of the saying of Horace in his "Poetic Art," — "Ne pueros coram populo Medea trucidet," "Ars Poetica," 185. The literal meaning — "Nor let Medea slay the youths before the public," or in sight of the audience — Browning turns into "Nor let a youth slay the old in public."

VIII. 38. *Now Portia, now for Daniel*: referring to "Merchant of Venice," iv. i. 223 and 333, the young girl meaning that her friend acting as a judge, like Portia, will give now a judgment worthy of Daniel.

46. "*Cigno fedel*," etc.: "faithful swan," etc. The Swan-song from Wagner's "Lohengrin," of bad omen, since the marriage in that opera meant separation later.

49. *Amo te solo*," etc.: "Thee alone I love," etc. The song of Leonore from Beethoven's "Fidelio," celebrating faithful and lasting married love.

TWO POETS OF CROISIC

Prologue. This little lyric symbolizes in three different poetical figures the power of love to change the whole aspect of life, with the added thought in the last stanza that love is a revelation of the divine.

Two Poets of Croisic. Two friends are sitting before a fire of driftwood, watching the colored flames. The speaker calls to mind childish games when the sparks from the fire were given the names of various great ones, and their fate connected with the life of the spark. Now he wonders what coming bard or sage the flames colored by the rusting metals of the driftwood are prophetic of. He turns from this stripling's amuse-

ment to something graver. He will choose sparkles to be symbolic of souls quenched in mid-career. Going in search of such souls, he allows his imagination to drift with the driftwood to Croisic in Brittany, the first port made, for life is to be found anywhere. The two flames chosen shall herald what kind of heroes he asks of his friend — two poets who flourished a hundred years apart, each in his day having Paris at his feet. The first was René Gentilhomme, page to the Prince of Condé, who hung on the hope that he might one day be King of France, if only Louis and his brother would die without heirs, as there seemed some probability of their doing. Pending his expected accession to the throne, the Prince withdrew to a certain pleasure house, where the page enlivened the household with his poetical talents. One day when he was versifying, a sudden flash of lightning from a clear sky struck the crown off a bust of the Duke. This event gave René a sudden inspiration, which resulted in his writing a poetical prophecy to the effect that the Duke would never be king, and a Dauphin would be born within a year. Afraid of what the consequences of his prophecy might be when the Prince and his courtiers should read it, René retired from the court. A year after a Dauphin was born. The courtiers of the Duke were quick to transfer their allegiance; they bore witness to the prophecy, and René was immediately accepted as an inspired poet by the Parisian world. King Louis made him the royal poet, and his portrait was painted. But in spite of all these honors his name fell into complete oblivion, only to be uncarthed a hundred years later by the other poet, who was interested in him through his portrait. In his attempt to trace the history of the portrait he fell in with an old gentleman who had possessed René's work, — one slim volume, — but this had been burned when his house at Nantes had been destroyed by fire. The old gentleman told him the tradition, and so perished

the last trace of the once famous René. Even the portrait is no longer to be found in Croisic.

The speaker in the poem goes on to express his interest as to how an ordinary soul would feel who had been dealt with directly by God. The common affairs of life would appear, he thinks, unrealities in face of this great reality. Therefore it is better that we live this life out without such revelations, awaiting award at the end. Through our own aspirations toward beauty and truth, we get a simulated revelation which gives us a glimpse of the reality beyond, better suited to our human needs. He concludes that it was wise in René not to write any more poetry, as it would have had little interest after prophecy.

The second poet, Paul Desforges Maillard, wrote quatrains and sonnets in honor of all the belles in Croisic until he was thirty, and acquired some little fame in the neighborhood. Then he aspired to become known in Paris, and opportunely "The Academy" offered a prize for a poem on "The Art of Navigation." Paul composes one on the subject, but the critical "Forty" decide that his "perfect" production is singularly poor. Not to be discouraged, Paul sends it to La Roque, the editor of the Paris "Mercury," but he also declines it, though with compliments and the clever excuse that he cannot print it for fear of giving offence to the "Forty." The deceived Paul sends back a letter of indignation to the editor for refusing his poem upon such cowardly grounds as fear of the "Forty;" and showing his true colors, the editor retorts that the poem is execrable past belief. Paul is comforted somewhat by the incense of his relatives who love him, in spite of the scorn of the Academy and the editor, for lifting them somewhat above the Croisic level.

When he begins to mumble something about kicking, his sister proposes a scheme by which he shall still make his mark. She points out to him that it was a

mistake for him to announce who he was, and take his stand only on merit. Let him put away his masterpiece, and she will copy in her feminine hand some of his poems in lighter vein, and send them to La Roque with a moving epistle under the name of Demoiselle Malcrais de la Vigne. The editor, pleased at the letter from a woman, prints the poem with some flattering editorial remarks. She continues to send poems, and La Roque continues to publish and gush, until all Paris is in an uproar, Voltaire, even, lost in admiration, and La Roque in love with the fair Breton poet. Paul now thinks it time to make himself known. His sister remonstrates with him, reminding him that the fame is due to the world's supposing the poetry comes from a feminine hand. Paul is loath to acknowledge this, and insists upon making himself known to La Roque, who gives the episode a humorous turn, and proposes a visit to Voltaire. The latter does not hesitate to show his disgust, and unceremoniously turns his back upon Paul, whereupon La Roque advises Paul to retire to Croisic, as his fame is at an end. This proved to be true. Voltaire and La Roque silent, the world forgot its idol. He, however, survives still in a play of Piron's called "*Métromanie*," for which his story furnished the plot.

The speaker suggests that if Croisic had chosen to make much of its two bards, their fame would not have died out. Since fame seems to depend upon such external things, he goes on to propose a test by which the worth of poets may be weighed. "He who lives a happy life is the best poet," he declares; that is, the poet who controls passions and emotions and sympathies, which would make him miserable if he gave way to them, and uses these means of might in his art, so transmuting even evil into beauty.

There is little more to be learned of the "Two Poets" than Browning tells in the poem. René Gentilhomme does not appear in any of the biographical dictionaries.

The poet has probably related the main incidents of the tradition just as they came to him when he was visiting the little town of Croisic. An account of Maillard may be found in the "Biographie Universelle." It differs little from the story told in the poem. He was born in 1699, and must have been a man of some learning, since he was a member of the academies of Rochelle, Caen, and Nancy. The story of his competing for a prize offered by the French Academy is as Browning tells it. According to history, it was Desforbes himself who conceived the plan of having his sister copy out the poorest of his poems under the name of Malcrais. Their reception by La Roque and the subsequent fame of the poetess is all as related in the poem. The proof of Voltaire's admiration still exists in a poem written to her and included in his works. It contains the line "Thou whose brilliant voice hast resounded upon our banks." After the *dénoûment* and Desforbes retired worsted, he wrote to Voltaire, asking him to help him to find a position in Paris. Voltaire replied: "I am reminded always of the coquetries of Mlle. Malcrais, in spite of your beard and of mine; and if I cannot make love to you, I will try and render you a service. I expect to see M. —, the *contrôleur-général*, this summer. I shall look for a good opportunity to serve you; and I shall be very happy if I can obtain something from the *Plutus* of Versailles in favor of the *Apollo* of Brittany." Voltaire, however, did not, according to accounts, live up to his promises. In 1735 the "*Poésies de Mlle. Malcrais de la Vigne*" were published, and in 1751 a volume of *Idyls* by Desforbes was published. There was also an edition of his work published in Amsterdam in 1759. He died on December 10, 1772.

4. *Crusted roundabout with copper*: logs that drift to the shore from wrecks are much prized for fires. The clamps, nails, metal sheathings, etc., used in a ship's construction, remaining attached to them, are acted

upon by the sea water, and the wood, becoming encrusted with deposits from the metals, gives out variously and brightly colored flames.

30. *Octogenarian Keats*: any one of Browning's age might have played this game when a little boy, and named a spark Keats, not foreseeing that Keats was to die at twenty-four in 1820, and that the long life of his spark was a poor prophecy.

47. *As Job and Hebrew name a spark*: see Job v. 7; xviii. 5; Isaiah i. 31; l. 11.

81. *Croisic*, etc.: a village on a small peninsula of the same name on the southern coast of Brittany. The name means "little cross," and was given to it from the small Chapel of the Crucifix, built in commemoration of the baptism of the Saxon colony there by St. Felix, Bishop of Nantes, in the sixth century. The following short description of the place is from Katherine S. Macquoid's "Through Brittany": "At first sight it looks like a dull little fishing-village. The port is completely enclosed by small islands, and a long artificial causeway, called the *Chaussée de Pembron*, built to preserve the salt marshes from the inroads of the sea, for there seems to be little doubt that the whole of the peninsula, including Le Croisic, Batz, and Le Pouliguen, was at one time an island, and that by degrees the channel between it and the mainland has transformed itself into salt-marshes. There are plenty of fishing-boats and stalwart-looking fishermen; but, following the straggling line of granite houses which surrounds the bay, we remarked that many of them were very curious, and almost all were very ancient in appearance. Farther on is some higher ground, grassed sand-hills with furze and broom at intervals, and shaded by trees; and from this, at some distance, we saw the pier stretching into the sea. Near the pier are the *établissement des bains* and the *hôtel*. . . . There is little to see in Le Croisic itself, though it is a good plan to stay a few days there, so as to see some-

thing of the very original inhabitants of this peninsula. The church Notre Dame de la Pitié is not remarkable. Another chapel, St. Goustan, is now closed, but the women of Croisic still pray there for those at sea. From the Mont Esprit, at the end of the promenade called Le Mail, there is an excellent view of the town and harbor of Le Croisic; the town surrounded by the sandy waste of salt pans, and rising from these the church towers of Batz and of La Guérande. Beyond the harbor is the Atlantic; there is a fine sea view from Mont Lenigo. The population seems to be partly composed of fishermen and partly of salt-workers; but there is here, as well as in the Bourg de Batz, a certain separateness and exclusiveness of both costume and ideas. The people of Le Croisic call themselves Croisicais, in contradistinction to Bretons, but they do not seem so fine a race as the people of the Bourg de Batz. Alain Bouchart, the historian, was born at Le Croisic; and in the fifteenth century this town seems to have been rich and prosperous, the centre of the salt-trade."

83. *Guérande*: small town near Le Croisic.

84. *Batz*: another small town near Le Croisic.

85. *Where ocean gluts their promontory's breadth with salt*: see preceding note, 81.

90. *The Druids' chosen chief of homes*: there are more remains of Druidical monuments in Brittany than in any other spot where Druidism prevailed, and it is said that there is no other district in Europe where the popular Christianity has assimilated more from earlier creeds, Paganism not having been even nominally abolished until the seventeenth century. Witchcraft and the influence of fairies are generally believed in, and charms and antidotes are trustfully resorted to. According to Reynaud, who is one of the later authorities, the Druids believed in the immortality of the soul; their god, Thesus, was the type of an absolutely supreme being, whose symbol on earth was the oak. The mistletoe, when found growing on the oak, rep-

resented man, a creature entirely dependent on God for support, yet with an individual existence of his own. Earlier writers say that they worshipped Apollo under the name of Belenus, and that they believed in transmigration of souls, their philosophy being much like that of Pythagoras. For original suggestions upon the meaning of the oak and the mistletoe in Druidism, see Fraser's "The Golden Bough." Browning, in the stanzas following, gives an interesting glimpse of customs still prevailing in Croisic which are survivals of Druidical rites.

107. *Menhir*: a stone monument, consisting of a single tall stone, said to mark the spot of a grave or possibly a battle.

160. *Hervé Riel*: the Breton hero who piloted the French ships into harbor, and saved them from the English in the reign of Louis XIV., who sent an expedition against England to restore James II. to the throne. See notes on Browning's poem to Hervé Riel in the "Paecharotto" volume.

165. *Gules*: the term used to denote the red color in heraldry. — *Vert*: the term used to denote green.

201. *Prince of Condé*: Henry, an important statesman during the reign of Louis XIII. His father and grandfather were Huguenots, but he strove to obliterate the connections of his house with the Huguenots by exhibiting the greatest zeal against Protestants. His old ambition changed into a desire for the safe aggrandizement of his family, which he achieved, though, according to Browning's story, not as fully as he wished.

204. *Anne of Austria*: daughter of Philip III. of Spain, born 1601; became the wife of Louis XIII. in 1615. The royal pair lived for twenty-three years in a state of virtual separation, a result said to be due to Cardinal Richelieu, who wished to humble the house of Austria.

289. *Neat crowquill calligraph*: fine writing done with

his crowquill pen, over which the inspired poet puts down his new thoughts in hurried, blurring strokes.

299. *Divinior mens*: diviner thought. Horace's phrase for "inspiration."

302. *Rhadamanthine*: adjective from Rhadamanthus, who was one of the judges of the dead in Hades.

320. *Dauphin*: the title given to the heir-apparent of the French throne.

335. *Cony-kind*: a cony is a simpleton or dupe.

360. *Simeon*: see Genesis xxix. 33.

382. *The biforked hill betwixt . . . Getic trump*: the summit of Mt. Parnassus was divided into two peaks, one sacred to the Muses, the other sacred to Apollo. The city of Delphi, at the foot of Mt. Parnassus, contained the Oracle of Apollo, where the fates were declared. *Getic* may stand for Gothic, from *Getæ*, an ancient people of Thrace, dwelling in Modern Bulgaria, later Bes-Arabia. Goths settled in their country and mixed with them. Jordanes, an historian, calls his history of the Goths a "Getic History." Thus this poet combined the qualities of a Greek oracle (Delphic quill) with those of Christian prophecy; *Getic* or Gothic standing for Christian culture as opposed to Pagan culture.

483. *As the reed is crushed . . . fortalice*: this rather complicated comparison may be simplified to read "as an old world beast tramples down reeds, when he follows a blind impulse to speed or migrate to a new land in order that life's purpose may be fulfilled through the presence of living animals, before an ice period make it unfit to support life."

488. *Fortalice*: an outwork of a fortification.

544. *Voltaire*: François Marie Arouet, French poet, historian, and philosopher (1694-1778).

577. *Academy*: the French Academy was instituted in 1635 by Cardinal Richelieu, having grown out of a little private literary club of eight members. Their officers consisted of a director and a chancellor chosen

by lot, and a permanent secretary chosen by vote. The membership was limited to forty, and its object was the purification of the French language. It became an important critical body, and exercised much influence on French letters. Its tendency, however, was to crush originality.

585. *Neptune and Amphitrité:* Neptune was the brother of Zeus and ruler of the sea; his wife, Amphitrité, was one of the fifty fair daughters of Nereus, called Nereïds. — *Thetis:* another of the Nereïds, who married the mortal Peleus.

586. *Tethys:* one of the Titans who, with Oceanus, founded the older dynasty of sea-gods.

587. *Triton:* son of Neptune and Amphitrité, the trumpeter of the ocean.

588. *It's Virgil:* in the "Æneid" Virgil describes how, when the fleet of Æneas was in danger of being wrecked through the hostility of Juno, Neptune came to their rescue, dismissed the winds, and pried off some of the ships which were stuck on the rocks with his trident, while Triton and a sea nymph put their shoulders under others and set them afloat.

589. *De Maille, Vendôme, Vermandois, Toulouse:* all dukes or counts more or less prominent as statesmen in France. They are to represent the winds blowing the art of navigation along.

626. *Brain-vibrios:* the vibrio is a form of bacterium.

648. "*Mercury:*" the "Mercure de France" was an important newspaper in France, having been founded in 1672 as the "Mercure Galant."

659. *Pierian rill:* the Pierian mountains are in Macedonia, directly north of Thessaly. They were said to be the birthplace of the Muses.

669. *Crambo:* a rhyme.

727. *Roland's crest:* Roland is the invincible hero of the Carolingian cycle of romance.

761. *Deïdamia:* daughter of Lycomedes of Scyros, and mother of Pyrrhus by Achilles. — *Achilles:* son of

Thetis and Peleus, one of the heroes of the Trojan war.

767. *Lady's-smock*: a flower.

786. *Brederac*: a little town in Brittany.

807. *Ad hoc*: to this.

824. *Deshoulières*: Antoinette du Ligier, a handsome and accomplished Frenchwoman, and a writer of versatility. Her "Idyls" are still remembered, though many plays and operas of hers are forgotten (1634-1694).

831. *Sappho*: a celebrated Greek writer of lyrics. Only a few fragments of her work have come down to us, but they serve to show the brilliancy of her genius. She flourished in the sixth century B. C.

870. *Dacier*: André, a learned French philologist, who translated Horace and Aristotle's "Poetics," etc. (1651-1722).

891. *Trévoux*: a town of France, fourteen miles from Lyons.

895. *Jean-Baptiste Rousseau*: celebrated French philosopher and writer (1712-1778).

912. *Donne*: John, English divine and poet (1573-1631).

966. *Phæbé*: a favorite name for heroines of pastoral romance. — *Phæbus*: Apollo, who killed the monster, Python, which haunted Mount Parnassus.

1008. *Idalian*: from the town Idalia, which was sacred to Venus.

1062. *Haut-de-chausses*: hose.

1091. *Carte-and-tierce*: a term in fencing.

1124. *Macchiavelli*: celebrated Florentine statesman. His name has become the synonym for politic and obnoxious policies, because of the principles he laid down in his work "Il Principe."

1197. *Belled the cat*: an armed conclave was held with the idea of ridding Scotland of the upstart Cochrane, who had risen from a mason to be the Earl of Mar. Lord Gray reminded them of the fable of the mice which laid a project for preventing the ravages of the

cat by tying a bell round the cat's neck. An excellent project, indeed, but who will bell the cat? "That will I," said Archibald Douglas, Earl of Angus; and ever after he was called Archibald Bell-the-Cat.

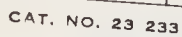
1223. *Chouse*: cheat.

1232. *Beddoes*: Thomas, a physician and poet. He imitated Darwin's scientific style in poetry (1760-1808).

Epilogue. This illustrates the power of love to round out the broken harmonies of life and art by a Greek tale, supposed to be told to the poet by a young girl, of a Greek poet whose lyre-string, snapping at a critical moment, was supplied to perfection by the voice of a cricket, which lighted on the crippled lyre "for mere love of music."

4. *Was it prose or was it rhyme?* the tale appears in the Greek anthology in both prose and verse, and is quoted by Strabo from Timæus and by others. The version Browning uses (except that he changes the grasshopper to a cricket) is given in Mackail's "Select Epigrams from Greek Anthology," as follows: "The strife was of the lyre, and Parthis stood up against me; but when the Locrian shell sounded under the plectrum, a lyre-string rang and snapped jarringly; but ere ever the tune halted in its fair harmonies, a delicate-trilling grasshopper seated itself on the lyre and took up the note of the last string, and turned the rustic sound that till then was vocal in the groves to the strain of our touch upon the lyre; and therefore, blessed son of Leto, he does honor to thy grasshopper, seating the singer in brass upon his harp."

65. *His Lotte's power too spent*, etc.: an allusion to Goethe's elusive manner with young women when affairs pushed him to a choice between marriage and a career, as in Frederika's case. Charlotte Buff, on whom the Lotte of "Werther was modelled," was not really one of these, but, as Goethe says, he bestowed on her "the qualities of several lovely women."

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